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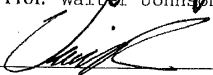
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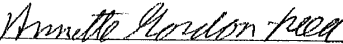
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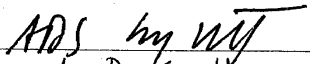
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Signature 
Typed name: Prof. Annette Gordon-Reed

Signature 
Typed name: Prof. Amy Drury Stanley

Date: April 23, 2012

“Mastering Emotions: The Emotional Politics of Slavery”

A dissertation presented

by

Erin Austin Dwyer

to

The History of American Civilization Program

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
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Professor Walter Johnson

Erin Austin Dwyer

Mastering Emotions: The Emotional Politics of Slavery

Abstract

Mastering Emotions: The Emotional Politics of Slavery explores how the emotions and affective norms of the Antebellum South were conditioned upon and constructed through the institution of slavery. Though slavery is a subject wrought with emotion, there has been no focus in recent historical scholarship on the affective dimensions of slavery. Studies in the history of emotion have also largely ignored slavery. My intervention in these fields reveals the ways that both slaveholders and slaves wielded fear, trust, jealousy, and affection in their interactions with one another. The project also sheds light on how the emotional norms of societies are learned and policed, manipulated and enforced. I argue that the emotions of slaveholders and slaves alike were irrevocably shaped by slavery. The daily negotiations and contestations that occurred between slaveholders and slaves through and about feelings, in conjunction with larger debates about race, freedom, and emotional norms, form the backbone of what I call the emotional politics of slavery. Mastering Emotions examines how the affective norms of slavery were taught, how emotional transgressions were punished, and the long-term impacts of those emotional norms on the affective landscape of the post-Reconstruction South.

To gain insight into the emotional lives and affective experiences of enslaved people and free people of color I use a variety of primary sources such as slave

narratives, letters, and court testimony. Steeped in the mode of sentimentalism, which encouraged people to reflect upon and articulate their feelings, slaveholders revealed how they felt about their slaves, and how they believed their slaves felt, in diaries, wills and even records of slave sales and manumissions.

Studying the affective terrain of the Antebellum South provides fresh insight into the politics of slavery, revealing how those in bondage used feelings to resist slavery, and how the planter class employed emotions to enforce the institution. This project also contributes to the burgeoning field of affective history by complicating understandings of how emotions are constructed in relation to power, and how power operates in affective relations.

Erin Austin Dwyer

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Introduction

“The passions are a numerous crowd
Imperious positive and loud...
If they grow wild and rave
They are thy masters, thou their slaves.”¹

In an article published in the DeBow's Review in 1851, Dr. Samuel A. Cartwright introduced an affliction that he claimed was “well known to our planters and overseers,” but was as yet unrecognized by the medical profession: “Drapetomania, or the disease causing Negroes to run away.” Cartwright asserted that this condition was “curable” as long as slaveholders used moderation in the treatment of their slaves. They were to neither be “too familiar” with a slave and treat them as an equal, nor to be “cruel to him, or punishing him in anger,” but to be “be kind and gracious.” Cartwright claimed that slaveholders needed to inspire “awe and reverence” in their slaves, or else “they will despise their masters.” According to Cartwright, once an enslaved person had lost respect for their owner, or began to loathe them, they “become sulky and dissatisfied.” Furthermore, he advised that “the cause of this sulkiness and dissatisfaction should be inquired into and removed,” otherwise the slaves were likely to run.²

Cartwright's attempt to medicalize enslaved resistance reveals a great deal about the role feelings played in maintaining slavery, as well as the extent to which enslaved people irrevocably shaped the emotional norms and practices of the Antebellum South.

¹ Poem cited in Catherine Clinton *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books) 66

² Samuel Cartwright, “Diseases and Peculiarities of the Negro Race – Concluded,” *De Bow's Review* 11 (September 1851): 331-336

He posited that slaveholders' affective expressions, and feelings like anger and affection, would trigger emotional responses in their slaves, including "awe and reverence," "sulkiness and dissatisfaction," or even loathing. But slaveholders were not only provoking their slaves' sentiments, enslaved people were also influencing slaveowners through their emotions. If Cartwright is to be believed, a slaveholder was supposed to be upset if their slaves "despis(ed)" them, should hope to be respected by them, and should take action to "remove" any cause for "sulkiness and dissatisfaction" that their slaves might feel, lest they run away. Planters and overseers were not only expected to be aware of their slaves emotional states, they were supposed to actively respond to them. In this way, this passage sheds light on the myriad ways that slavery constructed emotions in the Antebellum South, and how feelings could be used to police and challenge the institution.

Works like Cartwright's also speak volumes about the debates that raged in the Antebellum South over what the parameters of the emotional norms of slavery would be for slaveowners and for the enslaved. Was the affective objective for planters for their slaves to love them or be afraid of them? Should slaveholders express any sort of affection to slaves, or only induce fear? Did enslaved people gain more from deploying fear or trustworthiness? What emotions needed to be feigned, and which needed to be concealed?³ Would the governing hierarchy of these emotional standards be defined by race or by free status? And if the affective norms of the Antebellum South were rooted in slavery and slave status, then what would become of these practices with the coming of Emancipation?

³ For more on the performance of emotions in daily life see Erving Goffman *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1990)

In my dissertation I will argue that the emotions of the Antebellum South were not manufactured by elites, but rather were conditioned upon and constructed through the institution of slavery. For slaveholder and slaves alike, emotions were irrevocably shaped by slavery. These sentiments were central to how slaveholders maintained the institution, and how enslaved people endured and resisted it. The daily negotiations and contestations that occurred between slaveholders and slaves through and about feelings, in conjunction with larger debates about race, freedom and affective norms, form the back bone of what I term the emotional politics of slavery. In “Mastering Emotions” I examine how the affective strictures and practices of slavery were individually learned, collectively constructed, and socially embedded, and how these norms were impacted by the coming of Emancipation.

Increasing work has been done on how emotions are individually and socially constructed, and the role that feelings play in society. In his work on emotions and the French Revolution, William Reddy points out that in modern, Western culture, people have long viewed emotions "as private, quasi-biological responses that endanger our reason."⁴ Though there are biological components to feelings, such perceptions ignore how emotions are socially, culturally, politically and temporally contingent. This belief also implies that feelings are at odds with reason, eliding all the ways that emotions are strategically, and rationally employed. Instead, Reddy would argue that emotions are deliberately used to shore up and resist political institutions, which he refers to as “emotional regimes.” According to Reddy, one can quantify how free a particular

⁴ William M. Reddy *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework For the History of Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 113

“emotional regime” is by examining how much that society polices and restricts emotional expression.⁵

While William Reddy’s phrase “emotional regime” is useful for understanding how the planter class saw themselves as affective masters, of their slaves and of themselves, the term belies the fact that the emotional norms and practices of the Antebellum South were not determined solely or even primarily by planters and policy makers. Historians Peter Stearns and Carol Stearns, pioneers in the field of the history of emotions, provide a more democratic understanding of how emotional norms develop in a given society. Unlike the hierarchical implications of the term “emotional regime,” the Stearns argue that there can be multiple, competing or overlapping affective standards within a single society, and that studying these affective “subcultures” can shed light on exactly how elites attempt to create and enforce “dominant culture” of emotions.⁶

I would argue that the emotional norms of slavery were not produced in a top-down or unidirectional fashion, nor did slaves’ affective practices and experiences function as a separate emotional subculture.

Though slavery is a subject wrought with emotion, there has been no explicit focus in recent historical scholarship on the affective dimensions of slavery. Psychological histories of slavery of the 1940s-1960s served only to infantilize enslaved people,

⁵ Reddy defines an “emotional regime” as “the set of normative emotions and the official rituals, practices, and emotives that express and inculcate them; a necessary underpinning of any stable political regime.” He argues that restrictive “emotional regimes” will employ a number of forms of “emotional management” to keep emotions circumscribed at all times, while some regimes “use such strict emotional discipline only in certain institutions (armies, schools, priesthoods) or only at certain times of the year or certain stages of the life cycle. These regimes set few limits on emotional navigation outside these restricted domains.” William M. Reddy *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework For the History of Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 125, 129

⁶ Peter N. Stearns with Carol Z. Stearns, “Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards”, *The American Historical Review*, 90:4, (Oct., 1985), 813-836, 828

ignoring the nuanced and complex emotional landscape of slavery.⁷ Writings in subsequent decades examined the invaluable support provided by loving enslaved families, but did little to explore how emotions could be used strategically outside of the slave family, how emotional norms were learned and challenged, and what relationships existed between the feelings and affective lives of slaves and those who enslaved them.⁸ I argue instead that the emotions of enslaved people and slaveholders were contingent upon one another, constructed by slavery, but not solely characterized by the institution. Meanwhile, studies in the history of emotion have largely ignored slavery, preferring to focus on sentimentalism and the antislavery movement. I propose an intervention in these fields, bringing together the history of slavery and the history of emotions. I will also draw from cultural anthropology and psychology to portray how the institution of slavery fundamentally shaped the emotions of slaveholders and slaves through a variety of emotional behaviors and practices.

Historical evidence poses a challenge for this project, as slaves were all too often legally barred from writing, and thus recording their thoughts and feelings. To gain insight into the emotional lives and affective experiences of enslaved people and free people of color I use a variety of primary sources such as slave narratives, letters, and court testimony. Steeped in the mode of sentimentalism, which emphasized emotional reflection and articulation, slaveholders revealed how they felt about their slaves, and

⁷ This school is best exemplified by Stanley Elkins' *Slavery*, which argues that enslaved people were fundamentally characterized by emotional trauma, and Wilbur J. Cash's *The Mind of the South* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1941) which argued that members of the planter class suffered from a "guilt complex" about slavery.

⁸ See John Blassingame *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Herbert Gutman *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977); Jacqueline Jones *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family From Slavery to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985); Brenda Stevenson *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997)

how they believed their slaves felt, in diaries, wills and even records of slave sales and manumissions. I also rely heavily on contemporary newspapers and journals, and pro-slavery and anti-slavery writing, to explore how the emotional politics of slavery were forged and policed.

In the first chapter, "No One Can Imagine My Feelings," I discuss the ideological foundation of the emotional norms of slavery, and debates over whether those practices and feelings were tied to one's race or to slave status. In the following two chapters, I detail the emotional norms and practices of the Antebellum South, explore how they were constructed through and by slaves, and how enslaved people and slaveholders alike learned the affective rules that structured the world around them. Chapters four and five examine how slaves and slaveholders navigated these norms in their daily interactions, engaging in what I call the emotional politics of slavery. These chapters reveal how feelings and affective strictures were central to how slaveholders maintained slavery, and to how enslaved people endured and resisted the institution. Finally, in chapter six, "The Pursuit of Happiness," I study the conflicts that arose in the wake of Emancipation about what the post-slavery emotional norms of the South would be, and whether they would be primarily structured by race or free status.

This intervention in the history of slavery and the history of emotions has far-reaching implications for both fields. First, "Mastering Emotions" sheds light on the many ways that emotions shaped the social relations between slaveholders and the enslaved, and the role slavery played in constructing emotions. Studying the affective landscape of the Antebellum South provides fresh insight into the politics of slavery, revealing how those in bondage used feelings to resist and survive slavery, and how the planter class employed

emotions to enforce the institution. This project also contributes to the burgeoning field of affective history by complicating understandings of how emotions are constructed in relation to power, and how power operates in affective relations. By uniting these fields of study “Mastering Emotions” offers a new perspective on the lived-experience of slavery, and on the ways that emotions continue to be constructed and learned.

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Many Antebellum slaveholders may have balked at the notion that their feelings and affective practices were based on slavery and enslaved people, but they would agree that emotions were worthy of study. This was, after all, an era predominated by Sentimentalism, a period in which people were “encouraged by the culture to dwell on their feelings.”⁹ People of that era were also preoccupied with how those around them felt, whether the sentiments of others were sincere, and how they could be rendered legible.¹⁰ Emotions were thought to be very powerful, and it was believed that one could, as Charles Ball claimed, actually have “died of grief.”¹¹ As such, emotions could be

⁹ Barbara Weisberg *Talking to the Dead: Kate and Maggie Fox and the Rise of Spiritualism* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004) 56

¹⁰ For more on this subject see my discussions of sincerity and the popularity of phrenology in Chapter 4: “Breach of Confidence,” and Karen Halttunen *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830 - 1870*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982)

¹¹ Similarly, Moses Grandy recounted the story of a slave who was so upset at being divided from his family to be sold that “On the way with his buyers he dropped down dead; his heart was broken.” Meanwhile, Solomon Northup insinuated that an enslaved woman named Eliza died of “grief” after her children were sold away from her. One could also become sick from being emotionally overwrought; Harriet Jacobs recalled that her grandmother became gravely ill, which she claimed occurred when her “grandmother broke down under the weight of anxiety and toil.” Moses Grandy in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968) 36; Solomon Northup in *Puttin’ On Ole Massa*, 268, 280, 311; Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 102; Charles Ball *Fifty Years in Chains; or, the Life of An American Slave* (New York: H. Dayton Publishers, 1859) 27

used as a weapon, strategically concealed, or revealing volumes, wielded by slaveholders and the enslaved alike for a variety of purposes.

Enslaved people were all too aware of the importance of successfully navigating the emotional politics of slavery, which required that they master their own affective performances, and that they be attentive to subtle shifts in their masters' moods, since their masters' feelings could have a profound impact on those they enslaved. A passage from the diary of the antislavery wife of a planter, actress Fanny Kemble, reveals how slaves perceived their master's feelings, and how they reacted. Kemble went on her "usual paddle" with an enslaved man named Jack, who had become a sort of companion and guide during her time on the Georgia islands where her husband's plantations were located. She recalled that as she:

"tried fishing. I was absorbed in many sad and serious considerations until, after I know not how long a time elapsing without the shadow of a nibble, I was recalled to a most ludicrous perception of my ill success by Jack's sudden observation, 'Missis, fishing berry good fun when um fish bite.' This settled the fishing for that morning."

On their return Jack changed the subject by asking her questions about the North, and England, and telling her about Mr. Butler's other plantations, which they would soon be visiting. Jack praised the St. Simon's plantation they, and Kemble noted that "he appeared very glad that we were going and ... mentioned what I was very glad to hear, that it was a beautiful place for riding."¹² This passage sheds light on the complex, nuanced emotional negotiations taking place between slaveholders and slaves during everyday interactions. Based off Kemble's recollection of their day together, it is clear that Jack perceived that Kemble was unhappy, and decided to subtly address the matter. Regardless of whether the "many sad and serious considerations" that "absorbed" her

¹² Frances Anne Kemble *Journal of a Residence On a Georgian Plantation In 1838-1839*, 65

were about her time in Georgia, her antipathy for slavery, her husband, or that she was having little luck at fishing, Jack could tell that she was upset, and he attempted to console her by letting her know that fishing could be “very good fun” when one was having more luck, implicitly letting her know that he was aware that she was feeling sad rather than enjoying herself. His subsequent questions about the places she had lived prior to Georgia could be construed as an attempt by Jack to sway her mood further by provoking her to think of happier times, and the land of her birth. This could also be why he extolled the virtues of the plantation they were soon to visit. Perhaps he hoped to comfort her because they had become friendly during their extended amounts of time together. Or perhaps he recognized how he might benefit in the long run from any efforts to remain in her favor.

Interestingly, Kemble hinted that she had read his emotional state as well, when she noted that “he appeared very glad” that they would be traveling to St. Simon’s. Her perception of his feelings seemed to subtly shade her own, as she used the same language she employed to describe *his* mood to articulate the fact that she was “very glad to hear” that she would be able to indulge her beloved hobby of riding on the island. Judging from the passing mention of her “sad and serious” thoughts, the overall tone of the entry, and the fact that she ended the paragraph on a note of hopeful anticipation about the “beautiful...riding” at St. Simon’s, Jack’s emotional navigation and mediation seems to have succeeded. Of course, what is less clear is if Jack was as “glad” as he “appeared” in speaking of St. Simon’s, or if he was donning the mask of happy anticipation to alleviate the somber mood that had permeated the boat. As a person born into slavery, he no doubt knew that how his mistress felt could have far reaching implications for his emotional

and physical state, and that his performance of happiness could potentially sway her towards contentment.

The interactions between Fanny Kemble and Jack also speak volumes about how complicated the affective relationships between enslaved people and members of the planter class could be. As Nell Irvin Painter argued in her groundbreaking essay *Soul Murder and Slavery*, “hierarchy by no means precludes attachment.”¹³ While it is true that all kinds of “attachment(s)” developed between enslaved people and slaves in myriad ways and for a number of reasons, the writings of former slaves also call into question the depth and authenticity of some of those affections. In his slave narrative, Charles Ball argued that “there never can be any affinity of feeling between master and slave,” because the performance of those emotions could never be separated from the function those feelings served in the relationships between enslaved people and slaveholders. Ball claimed that when there appeared to be affection between slaveholder and slaves, it was because “the master had treated his slave in such a manner as to have excited in him strong feelings of gratitude,” or because the slave harbored “apprehensions” of being sold, and potentially ending up with “a more tyrannical ruler,” enslaved in even “worse” conditions.¹⁴ Thus Ball posited that any emotions approaching “affinity” that occurred between an enslaved person and their owner were always rooted in a past, present or future negotiation, contingent on the advantages or disadvantages that could be exchanged. In this case, an enslaved person showed “affinity” in return for “gratitude,” or in hopes of obtaining freedom, or out of fear of a “worse” owner. Given Ball’s claims, I

¹³ Nell Irvin Painter *Soul Murder and Slavery*, The Fifteenth Charles Edmondson Historical Lectures, Baylor University, April 5-6, 1993 (Waco, TX: Markham Press Fund, Baylor University Press, 1995) 25

¹⁴ Charles Ball *Fifty Years in Chains; or, the Life of An American Slave* (New York: H. Dayton Publishers, 1859) 218

would argue that one can never know what enslaved people or slaveholders in the Antebellum South truly felt, or even what a “true” emotion would be, any more than one can know today what another person is genuinely feeling. Instead, I will focus on emotions as performative, and on the work emotions could do in the interactions between enslaved people and members of the planter class.

As Kemble’s diary suggests, slaves and slaveholders alike were acutely aware of one another’s emotions, and with great reason. First and foremost, emotions served as barometers. As Steven Stowe argues in his work on the rituals of the Antebellum South, “shaped by ritual, feelings *explained* things.”¹⁵ For slaveholders in particular, the feelings of enslaved people were viewed as a measure of productivity, of one’s worth as a master, as portents of possible danger, and also as something that had value in itself. For enslaved people, gauging the emotions of one’s owner could be used to ensure survival, to assist in negotiations, to obtain favor and favors, and even to help escape from slavery.

Just as Jack sought to interpret Fanny Kemble’s feelings, Frederick Douglass described the emotional states of most of his owners in the course of his autobiographies, suggesting that he was constantly reading their emotions. Captain Lloyd, he recalled as temperamental, remarking: “I have seen him in a tempest of passion...a passion into which entered all the bitter ingredients of pride, hatred, envy, jealousy, and the thirst of

¹⁵ Steven M. Stowe *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) 105; In his work on the ritualistic role of duels, courtship and honor in the Antebellum South, Steven Stowe seeks to flesh out “a shared intellectual and emotional terrain” of the “dominant class” of the South, planters. Yet Stowe does not see enslaved people as part of this “emotional terrain.” Instead, he explains that “I have been struck with how seldom [family] letters make mention of black people, even familiar, personal servants. ...The conclusion I draw is that the proximity of certain black individuals to the white elite should not in the least imply intimacy.” (xvi-xvii) I will be arguing against this notion that the “emotional terrain” of the Antebellum South was a racialized but unrelated binary.

revenge."¹⁶ Trying to discern Lloyd's emotional state could not only help him avoid the brunt of a slaveholder's "hatred" and "jealousy," he could learn even more potentially useful information. In Douglass' second autobiography he recounted how he became attentive when in the presence of white people to any mentions of "slave" and "slavery," words that were often accompanied by the term "abolitionist." He could not help but notice that "there was *fear* as well as *rage*," whenever the topic of "abolitionists" arose. As a result, Douglass made it his goal to learn "*who* and *what* the abolitionists were, and *why* they were so obnoxious to the slaveholder."¹⁷ He suggested that in the long run, this knowledge helped him in his quest for freedom, and strengthened his desire to run away. Attuned to perceive the emotions of members of the planter class, he was able to gain useful information by taking note of their hatred, and thus identifying the enemy (abolitionists) of his own enemy.

Picking up on the emotions of slaveholders also had the potential to serve as an early warning system for enslaved people. In a slave narrative published in 1867 Sella Martin recalled one slave mistress as well intentioned, and kind to him. Thus one morning when he found her to be very upset, he wrote that "seeing her so disturbed" he "began to inquire as to the cause." If an owner who had been relatively sympathetic was upset, there were a number of reasons for him to respond. Even as a child he understood that enslaved people were supposed to be attentive to slaveholders' feelings, and that those feelings might have profound implications for themselves. Martin learned that the woman was "disturbed" because Martin was to be sold to cover the family debts, so he

¹⁶ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993) 65

¹⁷ *ibid*, 120-121

hurried to see his mother before they were separated forever, but it was too late.¹⁸ This may also have served as a sad lesson to Martin about how to interpret both the content and sincerity of slaveholding emotions.¹⁹

For members of the planter class, there were a number of perceived benefits associated with monitoring slaves' emotions. Many planters cared about what their slaves felt because they believed that enslaved people's emotional state was directly linked to their labor output.²⁰ In an excerpt from his book on plantation management published in the *De Bow's Review*, Dr. H. N. McTyeire devoted a great deal of time to discussing the importance of monitoring and controlling the emotions of enslaved people. McTyeire inverted the claim that happy slaves worked harder, claiming that slaves would not be happy without work. He linked slaves' "idleness," the bane of all slaveholders, to their unhappiness, warning his fellow planters "If you would find surly, discontented, murmuring servants, seek out idle ones."²¹ To be "idle" was to be "discontent," so clearly the secret to enslaved happiness was unremitting labor. McTyeire argued that a well-cared for, "happier" slave was "put beyond discontent, or the temptations to rebellion and abduction; for he gains nothing in comparison with what he loses" by resisting or running away.²²

Slave narratives sometimes suggest that kinder treatment led them to work more enthusiastically, though they did not go so far as to say that this made slaves "happier."

¹⁸ Sella Martin in John W. Blassingame *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998) 706-708

¹⁹ I'll discuss how slaves and slaveholders learned the emotional norms of slavery, both as children and as adults, in my second and third chapters. Martin's mistress is also an example of how adults raised outside of the South were expected to learn the emotional norms of the slave South.

²⁰ See for example the article by a Mississippi Planter, "Management of Negroes upon Southern Estates," *DeBow's Review* 10 (June 1851), 621-627

²¹ . D. B. De Bow [The Editor], H. N. McTyeire "Plantation Life—Duties and Responsibilities," *DeBow's Review* 29-3 (September 1860) 357

²² *ibid*, 363

After catching the old overseer stealing, Josiah Henson became the new supervisor, which gave him a unique perspective on emotions and work. Looking back on this position, he remarked that he “raise(d)... more than double the crops, with more cheerful and willing labor, than was ever seen on the estate before.”²³ Henson was clearly proud of both his skills as an effective manager, and of his ability to ensure that his workers remained “cheerful.” Solomon Northup unequivocally stated: “It is a fact I have more than once observed, that those who treated their slaves most leniently, were rewarded by the greatest amount of labor. I know it from my own experience.”

Though neither Henson nor Northup suggested that slaves were unhappy if they did not work, or that “lenient” overseers made enslaved people happy, Northup did discuss the joy that was possible in work, observing that: “It was a source of pleasure to surprise Master Ford with a greater day’s work than was required, while... subsequent masters” thought only to exhort slaves to work with “the overseer’s lash.”²⁴ Northup did not claim that all slaves believed work to be “a source of pleasure,” but he implied that exceeding his master’s expectations was a greater motivator than the whip. Of course, these claims that they were personally willing to work more for “kind” masters and overseers might have been deliberate attempts to play on existing planter theories that happy slaves worked harder, in the hopes of alleviating physical pain, if not work, for people still enslaved.

²³ Josiah Henson *The life of Josiah Henson: formerly a slave, now an inhabitant of Canada*, 1849, 10

²⁴ Solomon Northup in *Puttin’ On Ole Massa: The Slave Narratives of Henry Bibb, William Wells Brown, and Solomon Northup* Gilbert Osofsky, ed (New York: Harper & Row, 1969) 275; Similarly, Henry Brown described the overseer who replaced the cruel Stephen Bennett as “the best that we had,” and that “He possessed a much greater influence by his kindness than any overseer did by his lash.” Henry Box Brown *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown* written by himself, introduction by Richard Newman, Foreword by Henry Louis Gates, Jr (New York, (Oxford University Press, 2002) 32

In contrast, Northup later claimed that the enslaved woman Eliza displeased their owner because after her children were sold because Eliza was “more occupied in brooding over her sorrows than in attending to her business.” Because she was mourning the separation from her children she was believed to be shirking her responsibilities as a house slave, and as a result was “sent down to work in the field on the plantation.”²⁵ This suggests that slaveholders were not only concerned with maintaining a happy workforce in order to promote productivity. If Eliza was “brooding” too much to be an effective house slave, she would surely be equally inattentive to field work. This implies that slaveholders either wanted to punish unhappy slaves, or they simply did not want to be forced to witness “her sorrows,” perhaps because it challenged their carefully crafted self-image of benevolence.

The writings of former slaves suggest that slaveholders also believed that slaves’ emotions affected their value. As I will show in Chapter 4: “Breach of Confidence,” enslaved people who were perceived as faithful and trustworthy were worth more on the slave market, while slave traders often lied about the character of slaves who had been in any way untrustworthy or deceitful, in the hopes of fetching a higher price for them. Ideas about the commodification of slaves’ emotions also shaped other slave policy. One of Frederick Douglass’s owners, Mr. Auld, based his argument for why slaves such as Douglass, should not be taught to read on the idea that literacy “would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master...It would make [Douglass] discontented and unhappy.”²⁶ According to Auld’s elaborate causal chain, a slave’s increased knowledge was directly linked to his capacity to obey,

²⁵ Solomon Northup in *Puttin’ On Ole Massa*, 280

²⁶ Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, [1845], 2003) 41

and thus be a “manageable” worker. Auld argued that literacy would make Douglass “unhappy,” and this, in turn, would shape his market value.

Nor was Auld the only slaveholder who believed that a managed slave was a content slave, and that a manageable slave made for a contented master. One Mississippi planter writing in the *DeBow’s Review* in 1851 endeavored to start a dialogue with his fellow planters about the all-important subject, “the proper treatment of ... slaves.” He called upon other members of the planter class to establish “some general, practicable rules for” managing slaves, which he believed “would add to the happiness of both master and servant.”²⁷ This planter seemingly wanted to determine whatever codes of conduct would make slaves most productive and to ensure sure that the emotional rules they established were collectively practiced for optimal results. But he also suggested that the “happiness” of slave owners and enslaved people were intertwined, that content slaves ensured happy masters.

As the writings of the Mississippi planter reveal, many slaveholders seemed to genuinely base their own happiness, and sense of self on whether or not they were loved or feared by their slaves. As Walter Johnson observes in *Soul By Soul*, slaveholders “dreamed of beating and healing and sleeping with slaves; sometimes they even dreamed that their slaves would love them,” and in doing so fantasized about “who they could be by thinking about whom they could buy.”²⁸ Their very identities were based not only on their slaves, but on what the people they purchased felt. How much some slaveholders based their identity on how their slaves felt about them is particularly clear in Drew

²⁷ A Mississippi Planter, “Management of Negroes upon Southern Estates,” *DeBow’s Review* 10 (June 1851), 621-627

²⁸ Walter Johnson *Soul By Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001) 79

Gilpin Faust's biography of planter and politician James Henry Hammond. Hammond was seemingly obsessed with how his slaves felt about him, "writing to a friend that he found comfort in the idea that "my negroes...love and appreciate me."²⁹ According to Faust, Hammond aspired to simultaneously inspire fear and heart-felt affection in his slaves. Clearly members of the planter class were not only interested in what their slaves were feeling, they cared desperately what their slaves felt about *them*.

Perhaps because they were so concerned with how their slaves felt, many members of the planter class convinced themselves that they could ordain and tightly circumscribe what feelings their slaves possessed. According to McTyeire (whom J. D. B. DeBow himself described as "a South-Carolinian by birth and in feeling.") If a slaveholder did not consider his slaves' emotions then the slave-owner would inevitably "vex his own soul" while also "render(ing) his servants worthless and wretched." To avoid this fate, McTyeire claimed that a slaveholder should "appeal...to and cultivate" their slaves' "love and fear," and encourage their "regard of public opinion, gratitude, shame," while promoting what McTyeire called "the conjugal, parental and filial feelings."³⁰ Slaveholders might need to think of their slaves' feelings and "appeal" to those emotions, but ultimately he was asserting that a master exerted their control (and avoided their own annoyance) by insisting which emotions must be "cultivated."

Of course, to maintain the prescribed boundaries of the emotional norms of slavery, members of the planter class would also have to "cultivate" certain feelings over others. As I show in Chapters two and three, enslaved and slaveholding children were

²⁹ Drew Gilpin Faust *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982) 90, 104

³⁰ D. B. De Bow [The Editor], H. N. McTyeire "Plantation Life—Duties and Responsibilities," *DeBow's Review* 29-3 (September 1860) 361

inculcated with the emotional norms and practices of slavery from a young age, learning the affective strictures that would shape their lives from parents, peers and adult slaves, through play, and from observing the world around them. But children were not the only ones who needed to learn the emotional regulations and norms of the South. The writings of slaves and members of the planter class alike reveal the widespread notion that people who did not grow up owning slaves but became slaveholders as adults had to be taught the affective norms of slavery, and how to interact in an appropriate manner with slaves. These authors suggested that poor whites, Northerners, and foreigners who were transplanted to the South did not know how to feel about their slaves, or how their slaves were supposed to feel about them. Discussions of how newcomers to slavery were believed to be cruel or inadequate slaveholders highlight just how crucial mastery of emotional norms was to being a proper and respected slaveowner.

Slaveholders found such individuals to be a convenient scapegoat for the perceived wrongs of slavery, while enslaved people also castigated them, with Frederick Douglass noting that “of all men, adopted slaveholders are the worst.”³¹ Douglass saw the effects of such inexperience as a slave to Captain Thomas Auld. Douglass remarked that “Captain Auld was not a born slaveholder,” but rather he became a slaveowner when he married a member of the planter class. Because of this, Douglass posited that Auld did not know how to emotionally manage slaves, as “he was cruel, but cowardly.... at times rigid, and at times lax.” Douglass pointed out that Auld seemed aware of the norms he ought to adhere to, as he worked to perform the role of feared and respected

³¹ Frederick Douglass would go on to observe in his second autobiography “It is easy to see, that, in entering upon the duties of a slaveholder, some little experience is needed.” Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom* (2003 [1855]) 113; Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 55

slaveholder. But he failed, for though “his airs, words, and actions, were the airs, words and actions of born slaveholders,” Auld gave a poor performance of slaveholding demeanor, and as a result Douglass claimed Auld “was an object of contempt,” amongst his peers, as well as his own slaves. According to Douglass, this “contempt” was evident in the fact that Auld’s slaves “called him ‘Captain Auld’” rather than master. Douglass also believed that his slaves’ “want of reverence” had a profound impact on Auld, making him “fretful,” “inconsisten(t),” and even more “awkward.”³² This implied that one could never truly obtain the appropriate behaviors and emotions of slavery if not born into it. Because he could not instill fear, his slaves disrespected him, and his peers held him in “contempt.”

According to Douglass, people who became slaveholders also needed to learn how to feel about their slaves. Douglass explained that Sophia Auld, wife of his master, came from a more modest background, and like her brother-in-law Thomas Auld, she had never owned a slave before. As a result, she did not entirely know how to behave towards slaves, what was emotionally appropriate and what was not. Douglass made it clear that many of Auld’s interactions with slaves were affectively inappropriate for a slave mistress, by suggesting that they were unusual. Douglass pointed out that Auld did not demand emotional censorship from her slaves, because she “did not deem it impudent or unmannerly for a slave to look her in the face.” Nor did she censor her own emotions; according to Douglass she listened to her slaves’ travails, and “there was no sorrow or suffering from which she did not tear.” Rather than keep her slaves at an affective distance, Auld offered material and emotional care to those who needed it, providing “comfort for every mourner that came within her reach,” so that “none left without

³² Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 55

feeling better for having seen her."³³ She was particularly unsure of how to feel about Douglass, the companion of her beloved son Tommy. Douglass argued that it was difficult for "her to think and to feel" that the enslaved boy, "who was loved by little Tommy, and who loved little Tommy; sustained to her only the relation of a chattel."³⁴

Douglass experienced firsthand how quickly novice slaveholders learned, and embraced the emotional norms of slavery, and how it affectively altered them. Though he initially believed Sophia Auld to be "a woman of the kindest heart and finest feelings," he bemoaned that her "kind heart had but a short time to remain such." Over time, he witnessed how she quickly became socialized into the norms of slavery, and evolved into a cruel slaveholder. According to Douglass, this change manifested physically, as "that cheerful eye, under the influence of slavery, soon became red with rage," her "voice, made all of sweet accord, changed to one of harsh and horrid discord, " and her "tender heart became stone."³⁵

Some slave narratives also discussed the inculcation process of Northerners in the South, describing how people who had not been raised in slave states had even more to learn about the emotional norms of slavery. Harriet Jacobs described one slaveholder who showed kindness to her family as "a miracle." According to Jacobs, though he owned many slaves himself, she swore that he "was not quite deaf to that mystic clock whose ticking is rarely heard in the slaveholder's breast," implying that unlike most slaveholders he listened to his heart in matters concerning his slaves. In order to explain such exceptional sympathy on the part of a slaveholder Jacobs noted that "This gentleman was a Northerner by birth, and had married a southern lady," as if to show that

³³ Ibid, 43, 40

³⁴ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom* (2003 [1855]) 113

³⁵ Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 40, 43

his anomalous affective reactions (which might not have been viewed so favorably by his fellow planters) might stem from having not been raised in the slave South.³⁶ Similarly, in addressing why one of his owners exhibited excessive sentiment about her slaves Sella Martin claimed that the woman was a “simple-hearted lady, who had been brought up in the North,” and had only come to the South “two months before her husband bought us, and, therefore, she had little knowledge of slavery, and still less the feelings of slaveholders.”³⁷

Though authors of slave narratives might attest that Northerners did not possess “the feelings of slaveholders,” they also discussed how quickly Northern transplants to the South became indoctrinated in the emotional norms of slavery. Harriet Jacobs remarked to her readers that “when northerners go to the south...they prove very apt scholars. They soon imbibe the sentiments and disposition of their neighbors.”³⁸ James W.C. Pennington was in agreement, declaring that Northerners “readily become the most cruel masters.”³⁹ Southern planters were all too quick to remark on this supposed phenomenon as well. In a pro-slavery essay Thomas Roderick Dew declared that it was a “fact, known to every man in the south, that the most cruel master are those who have been unaccustomed to slavery.” Because of this, he claimed that it was universally believed “that northern gentlemen who marry southern heiresses, are much severer masters than southern gentlemen.”⁴⁰ Likewise, James Henry Hammond opined that the “Scotch and English are the worst masters among us, and next to them our Northern

³⁶ Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 24

³⁷ Sella Martin in *Slave Testimony* (1998) 706-707

³⁸ Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 40

³⁹ James W. C. Pennington *The Former Blacksmith in Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) 73

⁴⁰ Thomas Roderick Dew in “Professor Dew on Slavery” in *The Pro-Slavery Argument* (Charleston: Walker, Richards and Co. 1852) 456

fellow-citizens,” arguing that because they were not “born and bred” around slavery, they were less “humane.”⁴¹

Former slave Sella Martin went into more depth about his reasons why foreign-born slaveholders were worse than those raised within the institution. While working on a boat route along the Gulf Coast he encountered an Italian man named Angelo, who he convinced to buy him, in the hopes that Angelo would take him to New Orleans, from which it would be easier to escape to the North. Martin explained that he would have no qualms running away from Angelo, because the man had not been “born and bred” to be a slaveholder, rather “he had come from a land that held no slaves,” and thus had chosen “to stain his hands with the iniquities of slavery for mere gain.”⁴² Not only did Martin imply that those inculcated with slavery from their youth had motives for owning slaves other than (or in addition to) monetary “gain,” he also hinted that one not raised with slavery would be easier to trick, and escape from.

Even slaveholders who were born and raised amidst the institution and its emotional norms sometimes deviated from what were considered the appropriate affective relations and rules. When this occurred, public opinion and gossip were often marshaled to highlight the emotional indiscretion, and reemphasize what were and were not proper feelings for members of the planter class. A man in the Red River told Frederick Law Olmsted a cautionary tale about a local slaveholder who was tried in court the previous year for attacking one of his slaves. According to Olmsted’s confidante, the planter grew attached to an enslaved woman, but “suspecting that she was unduly kind to

⁴¹ James Henry Hammond “Hammond’s Letters on Slavery” *The Pro-Slavery Argument: As Maintained By the Most Distinguished Writers of the Southern States, Containing the Several Essays, On the Subject, Of Chancellor Harper, Governor Hammond, Dr. Simms, and Professor Dew* (Charleston: Walker, Richards and Co. 1852) 127-128

⁴² Sella Martin from John Blassingame *Slave Testimony* (1977) 728

one of his men, in an anger of jealousy he mutilated him.” He wasn’t convicted, for lack of “sufficient testimony,” (any enslaved people who witnessed the assault would have been unable to testify⁴³) but the man told Olmsted that the local whites “believe(d) he was guilty, and ought to have been punished,” because “nobody” thought “there was any good reason for his being jealous of the boy.”⁴⁴ Thus the man suggested that the slaveholder had committed an affective crime, perhaps not because of how he felt about the enslaved woman, but because he dared to feel “jealous” of an enslaved man, when his peers believed there was no “good reason” to feel that way. Clearly it was deemed improper to be “jealous” of a slave, but it may also have been viewed as problematic to allow an enslaved person to spark such intense emotions, and in doing lose control of one’s own affective self-mastery.

The members of the planter class who were gossiped about, and slaveholders’ anxieties about becoming the subject of gossip, reveal a great deal about how emotional norms and appropriate affective relations were policed and maintained in the Antebellum South.⁴⁵ Pointing out where others had erred in their interactions with slaves not only sharply delineated the boundaries of appropriate emotional behavior for members of the planter class, it also instilled in them a fear of being grist for the scandal mill for any perceived affective transgressions. In his work on the social classes that comprised the slave South, Daniel Hundley stressed the importance of honor and character to

⁴³ For more on laws prohibiting enslaved people from testifying in court see my discussion of this topic in Chapter 4: “Breach of Confidence,” as well as Thomas D. Morris, *Southern Slavery and the Law, 1619-1860*, 269-270; Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 34; Moses Grandy in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) 37

⁴⁴ Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveler’s Observations on Cotton and Slavery In the American Slave States, 1853 – 1861* (Da Capo Press, New York: 1996) 277-278

⁴⁵ In his work *The Navigation of Feeling*, William Reddy argues that a variety of societies and cultures use tactics such as “gossip...for disciplining emotions or punishing emotional lapses.” William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling* (2001) 61

“gentlemen.” He claimed this was of particular importance to those who aspired to the upper ranks of the planter class, saying that middle-class men who yearned to be large slaveholders, a group he termed “cotton snobs,” experienced “torturing anxiety...to be well spoken of by the world.”⁴⁶ Hundley reiterated that all Southerners worked to maintain a good reputation, and stressed that one’s abilities as a slaveholder played a huge role in shaping one’s public image. According to Hundley, “It is no credit to any man in the South to have the reputation of being a hard master.”⁴⁷

Enslaved people knew very well that fear of public calumny was a powerful motivator for members of the planter class, and could lead slaveholders to second-guess whether their actions and affective relations with their slaves would be considered appropriate by others. Sella Martin witnessed this anxiety about public opinion firsthand when he sought his owner’s aid in visiting his elderly mother. After the slaveholder initially “seemed glad” to take Sella Martin some distance to visit his mother on another plantation, Martin observed that the man grew “cool on the subject.” Martin believed that he balked because he “reflected how sentimental, and therefore how silly, to slaveholders, it would appear” to travel so far “to take a slave-boy to see a slave-woman,” and so he reversed his decision to help Martin.⁴⁸ This indicates that simply thinking of how his peers would react had led the planter to feel some shame or regret about his offer, which he now viewed as overly “sentimental.” Evidently he knew that slaveholders

⁴⁶ Daniel R. Hundley *Social Relations in Our Southern States* edited with an introduction by William J. Cooper, Jr. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979) 185

⁴⁷ For more examples of pro-slavery authors discussing how shame and pride were based on one’s abilities as a master, and determined in the court of public opinion, see D. B. De Bow [The Editor], H. N. McTyeire “Plantation Life—Duties and Responsibilities,” *DeBow’s Review* 29-3 (September 1860) 358; *DeBow’s Review* Vol. XII, “Cotton Planters’ Convention,” 278; Daniel R. Hundley *Social Relations in Our Southern States* (1979) 186

⁴⁸ Sella Martin in John Blassingame’s *Slave Testimony* (1998) 713

ought not be too “sentimental” or appear to be too familiar with their slaves. Above all else, a slaveholder should not seem to be “silly.”

Slave mistresses were also acutely aware that to avoid gossip and maintain a reputation as a kind mistress they had to enact certain relationships with their slaves. Harriet Jacobs recalled that when her grandmother grew ill many of the local women “who were her customers” stopped by to visit her, and “to bring her some little comforts.” When Jacobs’ Aunt Nancy asked Mrs. Flint if she could be allowed to go care for her mother, Mrs. Flint refused, claiming that there wasn’t “any need” for her to go, and that she couldn’t “spare” Nancy. But Jacobs remarked that once Mrs. Flint learned that “other ladies in the neighborhood were so attentive” to the sick woman who had once been Flint’s slave, and “not wishing to be outdone in Christian charity,” she hurried to fawn over the woman on her sick bed.⁴⁹ Mrs. Flint must have suspected that her reputation would suffer if her peers were visiting her former slave, and she was not. By going to see Jacob’s grandmother, but not permitting Nancy to attend to her own sick mother, Flint also revealed that she was much more invested in the appearance of being an “attentive” and “Christian” woman, rather than actually being one.

Slave narratives indicate that at times, enslaved people were able to use slaveholders’ fears of losing face to their own advantage. Slaveowners were not only concerned about what other members of the planter class might say about their affective relations with slaves, they were anxious about what their own slaves might reveal. Harriet Jacobs claimed that her grandmother’s reputation in the community offered her “some protection,” because “Dr. Flint was afraid of her, and “dreaded her scorching rebukes.” In particular, he was concerned that because she was well known locally as “Aunt Marthy”

⁴⁹ Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 102-103

for her homemade “crackers and preserves,” and also widely admired, that if he abused her granddaughter she would make “his villainy...public,” which could damage his own reputation irreparably. Jacobs conceded that this was also a benefit of living in a town, rather than a more anonymous large city or an isolated rural area, because everyone knew “each other’s affairs.” This revealed the potential power of gossip, and the importance of location to crafting and protecting reputation.⁵⁰

Flint had reason to fear that the former slave’s word would trump his own. He no doubt recalled that when he had tried to sell her when her mistress died, despite the fact that she had long been promised her freedom, that there had been an intense public backlash. According to Jacobs, her grandmother’s “long and faithful service in the family was also well known,” as was “the intention of her mistress to leave her free,” so Flint’s actions were viewed with universal distaste. Because of this, on the day of the auction, when Jacobs’ grandmother came up for sale “many voices” in the audience cried “Shame! Shame! Who is going to sell *you*, aunt Marthy? Don’t stand there! This is no place for *you*.” Jacobs claimed that the extent of the public outrage was clear when “no one bid for her.” Finally her former mistress’s sister, who “knew how faithfully she had served her owners,” purchased her. The sister was only able to afford her because no one else placed a bid, and after buying the enslaved woman, she freed her.⁵¹ It would seem that in small Southern towns, reputation could function as a shield and as a weapon.

Given these fears about gossip, and ideas about the power of emotions, it is little wonder that slaveholders and slaves alike often worked diligently to conceal what they felt. In the sentimental period, the ability to control one’s emotions was considered to be a

⁵⁰ Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 28, 30. 13-14 For more in Jacobs on the power of gossip see pp. 47, 48

⁵¹ *ibid*, 13-14

key component of mastery of the self. Charles Ball saw the two as synonymous, writing that on one occasion when he was able to suppress his fear, doing so helped him “Recover...the power of self-government.”⁵² John Henry Hammond’s writings reveal that he was very concerned with masking his feelings, describing his efforts to “conceal “ his “excess of...sensitiveness” and how he “could not ‘bear that others should see my emotions.””⁵³ Hammond’s claim that he did not want “others” to “see” him be emotional hints that in spite of the attention paid in this period to vocalizing emotions, clearly not all individuals were appropriate audiences for one’s sentiments. Throughout her diary Fanny Kemble frequently hinted at the need to suppress some feelings when in the presence of slaves. Upset after an enslaved woman told her how she had been flogged by the overseer, Fanny Kemble wrote that she had to leave “the room because I was so disgusted and indignant that I could hardly restrain my feelings,” though she remarked that to “express them would have produced no good result.”⁵⁴ But later incidents suggest that Kemble did not just hide her sorrow and anger from slaves because she believed her emotions would be of no use. Hearing one sad story about a slave’s efforts to purchase his family’s freedom, Kemble claimed that she was so moved that she “felt as if I could have howled with helpless indignation and grief when he departed.”⁵⁵ As in the previous scene, Kemble implied that “indignation” and “grief” in particular had to be masked, but only until the slave “departed.” It is possible that Kemble, as an actress in the sentimental era, was performing the role of the affectionate mistress, or the righteously indignant abolitionist,

⁵² Charles Ball *Fifty Years in Chains* (1859) 257

⁵³ Drew Gilpin Faust *James Henry Hammond and the Old South*, 225

⁵⁴ Frances Anne Kemble *Journal of a Residence On a Georgian Plantation*, 16

⁵⁵ *ibid*, 82

for her reader. But what is far more telling is that she believed she had to conceal her feelings from the audience of her slaves.

Her belief that she had to specifically hide her feelings from the enslaved people on the plantation is particularly clear in her recollection of being caught crying by a slave. Kemble described how during a visit to the slave hospital, overwhelmed by requests and tales of abuse she left in a hurry, overcome by emotions. Once she was outside, and believed herself to be alone, she reported that “all the choking tear and sobs I had controlled broke forth, and I leaned there crying over the lots of these unfortunates.” She huddled there weeping until an enslaved man asked her why she was crying, and tried to comfort her. Realizing that she had been seen, and upset by this, Kemble “wandered home, stumbling with crying as I went.”⁵⁶ Once again, she may have been emphasizing her own emotional sensitivity and capacity to empathize, but she also felt the need to point out her efforts to hide these feelings from the slaves around her, even if it meant “stumbling” home blind with tears.

The fact that Kemble described suppressing her feelings until she was out of the presence of slaves hints that she believed it was not appropriate to give free-rein to her emotions, an impression she may have received from her slaveholder husband. Kemble made frequent and vociferous emotional appeals to her husband to improve the living and working conditions of the slaves on the plantation, and begged him not to sell certain slaves. When he ignored her requests, she sometimes blamed herself for being overly emotional, as she opined ruefully that perhaps she had failed because the “vehemence of my entreaties” had been “intemperate.”⁵⁷ After another fight her husband accused her of

⁵⁶ *ibid*, 118-119

⁵⁷ *ibid*, 52-53

being overly sentimental, and too easily susceptible to the slaves' affective demands. She claimed that he gave her "little credit for prudence or self-command," though she defended herself, swearing that she clearly possessed some capacity for "self-command," as evidenced by the fact that whenever she endured the sad stories of the slaves she managed to "hold my tongue."⁵⁸

In her work on slave mistresses Catherine Clinton claims that in "southern courtship, passions were to be curbed rather than cultivated." But the writings of some Southern authors suggest that the ability to "curb" one's own emotions was crucially linked to one's ability to govern others as well as one's self. Clinton cited one Southern lady who wrote about this in verse:

"The passions are a numerous crowd
Imperious positive and loud...
If they grow wild and rave
They are thy masters, thou their slaves."⁵⁹

In this author's view, failure to contain "wild" or excessive "passions" rendered a person enslaved by their own emotions. Because of this, members of the planter class had to suppress some sentiments not only to be proper, but in order to be seen as capable slaveholders. In her work on James Henry Hammond Drew Gilpin Faust's argues that Hammond's nature, combined with "the values of his culture demanded that he always dominate those around him," but clearly what Ball termed "self-government" was also important to this equation. It did not suffice to physically or legally dominate others;

⁵⁸ *ibid*, 59

⁵⁹ Poem cited in Catherine Clinton *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books) 66

Hammond wanted to affectively master the people around him, but to do so, he also had to control how mastery of slaves made him feel.⁶⁰

Hammond's writings highlight how much he strived to master his slaves' feelings, and his own feelings, as well as the anguish he experienced when his position as a master was difficult or precarious. When, as a young slaveholder, Hammond's slaves were not as pliable as he expected, he recalled that the "severity" he had to implement "cost me infinite pain" as he worked to get his slaves "broken in." He suggested that he felt "pain" both because his slaves were being challenging, but also because he loathed having to be a disciplinarian, rather than the benevolent master he imagined himself to be. Later, during the economic downturn of the early 1840s, Faust claims that Hammond "was in the grip of emotional as well as financial depression."⁶¹ For an ambitious man like Hammond, whose slave-based wealth and emotional state were inextricably linked, it was hard not to see how his feelings became tied to his slaves and his ability to maintain control over them as well as himself.

Thus it's clear that the emotional norms of slavery dictated that slaves and slaveholders alike should suppress certain emotions, and feign others, albeit for different reasons. For enslaved people, the stakes for failing to censor their feelings were much higher. Harriet Jacobs recounted one anecdote that highlighted how important it was for slaves to constantly suppress any emotions that might be deemed inappropriate. Jacobs described a cruel woman named Mrs. Wade who was mistress on a nearby plantation,

⁶⁰ Drew Gilpin Faust opines that "as a slaveowner, as in so many other dimensions of his life, Hammond desired to be both omnipotent and beloved." Drew Gilpin Faust *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982) 307, 104; Stephanie McCurry also discusses the importance of mastery of one's family, slaves and self, albeit for yeoman farmers, in *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1995)

⁶¹ Drew Gilpin Faust *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982) 225, 73, 224

who was known for the brutality with which she whipped her slaves. After Wade died, one enslaved woman who served as a caretaker for the slaveholder's children who had been subject to her abuses snuck into the room where the corpse was laid out. Holding one of Wade's children in one arm, the enslaved woman "dealt two blows" to her dead mistress's face, crying out "the devil is got you *now*!" Jacobs' surmised that the woman had "forgot that the child was looking on," or believed the child was too young to tell anyone what she had done. However, the young child was old enough to speak, and she told her father what she had seen the enslaved woman do to her mother, pantomiming "striking her own face with her little hand." Confronted with this information, the enslaved woman admitted to having slapped Mrs. Wade's corpse, and as a result the woman was sold south.⁶² Jacobs may have intended this tale to show the brutalities of slavery, or the fact that even children of the planter class could not be trusted, but it revealed another important lesson for enslaved people: that feelings such as anger that were considered inappropriate for a slave had to be concealed at all times.

As the passage from Jacobs suggests, the primary emotion many slaves needed to suppress was their hatred for slaveholders. Approached by a potential buyer that he found loathsome, Charles Ball recalled that "in my heart I detested him; but a slave is often afraid...divulge all he feels," so he suppressed how he felt about being purchased.⁶³ Nor were anger and contempt the only emotions deemed improper and even criminal for an enslaved person to express. Former slaves also knew that there were consequences for exhibiting sadness. Solomon Northup would go into great detail describing how an enslaved woman named Eliza was punished for failing to censor her grief over losing her children. He

⁶² Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 42-43

⁶³ Charles Ball *Fifty Years in Chains* (1859) 70

was himself struck when Eliza was separated from her two children, noting that it “was a mournful scene indeed,” and that he “would have cried... if I had dared.”⁶⁴ Even before he witnessed Eliza’s emotional deterioration, and how she was disciplined in a variety of ways for not suppressing how heartbroken she felt, he knew that crying would not be viewed favorably, so he “dared” not do so in the slave pen. In certain circumstances enslaved people perceived that joy might also be deemed inappropriate, and worthy of punishment. Mattie Jackson recalled how her mother had to conceal her joy when her eldest daughter ran away, and instead, in the presence of her owner, “she pretended to be vexed and angry.” The author of Jackson’s story seemed struck by the enslaved woman’s inability to reveal her true feelings, declaring: “Oh! The impenetrable masks of these poor black creatures! How much of joy, of sorrow, of misery and anguish have they hidden from their tormentors!”⁶⁵ But what was so moving for the narrator was a daily reality for many enslaved people.

Some enslaved people were less willing to mask their feelings for slaveholders’ benefit. Showing once again that slaves were constantly reading slaveholders’ emotions, Solomon Northup observed that one day his master seemed “even more morose and disagreeable than usual,” a sure sign that Northup needed to be wary. But Northup was only willing to alter his behavior so much. Northup declared that the man was his owner, and therefore “entitled by law to my flesh and blood.” However, Northup emphasized

⁶⁴ According to Shane and Graham White, this led to a situation in which enslaved people were unable to “articulate their resentments... without the threat of terrible punishment.” Shane White and Graham White *Stylin’: African American Expressive Culture From Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998) 133; For more on enslaved people being punished for exhibiting sorrow see Chapter 5: “He Wouldn’t Whip, He’d Punish”: Affective Discipline in the Antebellum South”; Solomon Northup from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin’ On Ole Massa* (1969) 265

⁶⁵ For more on masking emotions, see Ralph Ellison “Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke” from Ralph Ellison *Shadow and Act* (New York, 1964 (1972)) 49; Dr. L.S. Thompson, *The Story of Mattie J. Jackson, A True Story, written and arranged by Dr. L.S. Thompson, As Given By Mattie* (Lawrence: 1866) 18

that though his body legally belonged to the slaveholder “there was no law that could prevent me from looking upon him with intense contempt,” and so he refused to conceal how much he loathed the man.⁶⁶ Northup would concede his labor, but he saw his emotions as his own, and he would not temper the anger he felt for his the slaveholder. Openly gazing upon him “with intense contempt” was a way for Northup to show that his emotions could not be purchased.

Unlike Northup, many slaves believed that they stood to lose a great deal by revealing how they felt. As Charles Ball explained, no matter what, when in the presence of slaveholders, emotions had to be censored, remarking that “A slave must not manifest feelings of resentment,” but instead should feign “humility.” Ball recounted a number of incidents when he had to affectively perform to avoid punishment, and his writing highlights the conscious decisions enslaved people sometimes made, often in heated moments, to actively suppress certain emotions, and simulate others. Once, when white men interrogated him about how his owner treated him, Ball initially felt flush, and outraged, but he knew he could not express his true feelings, so instead he “forced a sort of smile upon my face.”⁶⁷ His description of his exact physical and emotional response to their comments hints at how aware slaves were that counterfeit emotions had to be summoned immediately, and fully embodied, if they were to effectively mask what they truly felt.

Other slaves wrote about strategically affecting certain feelings or emotional practices in order to manipulate their owners, or seek certain advantages. Josiah Henson recalled how ambitious he was as a youth, and how he sought the “favor” of the man who

⁶⁶ Solomon Northup in *Puttin' On Ole Massa*, 280-281

⁶⁷ Charles Ball *Fifty Years in Chains*, (1859) 235, 304, 265

owned him. According to Henson, trying to win the man over was a deliberate act, “an exercise of the understanding, rather than of the affections,” because he was “guided” at all times “by what I supposed would be effectual” in insuring that the slaveholder had a “favorable regard” for Henson. Henson saw the advantages to be obtained from being trusted, and so though he called the slaveholder a “petty despot,” Henson devoted his efforts to being “favor(ed)” by the man. Henson was seemingly emphasizing to the reader that he did not bear any real love for his master, but rather he deployed “affection” to intentionally obtain his owner’s goodwill, a decision rooted in “understanding” rather than irrational and heartfelt feelings.⁶⁸

Jacob Stroyer watched such calculations in action after his owner passed away. Knowing that the death of a slaveholder could have a profound impact on the lives of their slaves, the enslaved people on that plantation reacted in a variety of ways. According to Stroyer, some voiced their joy at the man’s death, proclaiming “Thank God, massa gone home to hell.” Meanwhile others thought about the future, “gathered in groups around mistress to comfort her,” and “shed false tears” as they did so. Stroyer explained that he knew their feelings of sorrow to be “false” because he claimed that the vast majority of the slaves on the plantation “were glad” that their master had passed away, but they believed they needed to perform the role of grieving slaves in the hopes of influencing her. Perhaps they hoped that she would remember those who had consoled her, and mourned their owner’s death and reward them with favor and improved treatment. But Stroyer noted that their efforts were in vain, for “after master’s death mistress was a great deal worse than he had been.”⁶⁹ Though in this case the tactic was

⁶⁸ Josiah Henson *The life of Josiah Henson: formerly a slave, now an inhabitant of Canada*, 1849, 8

⁶⁹ Jacob Stroyer in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) 29

not successful, many enslaved people would continue to rely on emotional performances in their interactions with slaveholders. As I will show throughout “Mastering Emotions,” like the slaves who “shed false tears” at the death of their master, many enslaved people found a variety of ways to strategically deploy emotions like affection, jealousy, trust and fear in order to endure slavery, and to even resist and challenge the affective strictures of the institution.

Of course, many slaveholders were concerned that their slaves were faking certain sentiments, though some convinced themselves otherwise. Seemingly unaware of why slaves like those Jacob Stroyer knew would perform sorrow upon the death of their owner, Thomas Roderick Dew swore that he did not “know a single family, in which the slaves.... do not manifest the most unfeigned grief at the deaths which occur among the whites.”⁷⁰ Other members of the planter class were more suspicious, and feared that slaves were counterfeiting emotions. Living in what was then the Spanish colony of New Orleans, Pierre-Louis Berquin-Devallon wrote about race relations in the city, including the interracial relationships of mixed race enslaved women and white men. He questioned the strength of the “attachment” between these women and their white owners, declaring that enslaved women “only affect a fondness for the whites; their hearts are with men of their own color.”⁷¹ With the outbreak of the Civil War, it became clear that feigned affection was the least of slaveholders’ concerns. Mary Chesnut for example grew increasingly concerned with what feelings her slaves did or did not reveal as the war progressed, convinced that they were performing some emotions, and concealing their

⁷⁰ Thomas Roderick Dew “Professor Dew on Slavery,” *The Pro-Slavery Argument*, 463

⁷¹ Pierre-Louis Berquin-Devallon, *Travels in Louisiana and The Floridas in the Year 1802*, (New York, 1806) 80

true feelings behind “black masks, not a ripple or an emotion showing.”⁷² For slaveholders, the fear was no longer that slaves were pretending to feel “grief” or “fondness,” but rather that the “masks” Chesnut identified hid joy at the demise of slavery, hopes of escape, or even vengeful, murderous intentions.

It’s clear that slaveholders believed that monitoring and policing their slaves’ emotions would help them to better manage their slaves, but why would slaveowners work to instill emotional strictures for slaveholders as well? Beyond providing slaveholders with a system for reading, rewarding and punishing enslaved people, the emotional norms of slavery also helped them maintain a united front as a planter class. Charles Ball opined that “the planters may well be compared to the inhabitants of a national frontier,” that was constantly subjected to the threat “of hostile invading tribes,” because they were surrounded at all times by slaves who resented them. Because of this, it was presumed that slaveholders would be natural allies. As Ball observed, when faced with the same “danger, and subject to like fears, it is expected that all will be governed by like sentiments, and act upon like principles.”⁷³ In other words, slaveholders were expected to feel the same concerns, and act upon those in a similar fashion, in order to preserve the institution of slavery.

The debate over how to emotionally maintain slavery was rendered moot with the end of the Civil War, but the conflict over whether or not the emotional strictures governing the South would be based on race or free status had far-reaching implications, particularly for free people of color. In the aftermath of Emancipation, Southern whites struggled to maintain the emotional hierarchies of slavery, and to deny free blacks their

⁷² *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War* ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) 464

⁷³ Charles Ball *Fifty Years in Chains*, (1859) 320-321

emotional and political rights. Of course, free people of color would continue to challenge these affective norms and restrictions. Nevertheless, the rise of legal and extralegal attempts to emotionally control free blacks revealed the commitment of many white Southerners to preserving the lasting legacy of the hierarchies of slavery, by any means necessary

Chapter One:

"No One Can Imagine My Feelings": Race, Slavery and Emotional Exceptionality

In his 1837 speech at the annual meeting of the Society for the Advancement of Learning of South Carolina William Harper spent a great deal of time discussing the relationship between emotions, slavery and race, and in particular on the ways in which people of African descent were emotionally inferior to white people. A lawyer and a politician, Harper began by asserting the physical, emotional and mental superiority of white people over "the African Negro," observing that the "the races differ in every bone and muscle, and in the proportion of brain and nerves," before explaining that because of these differences it was impossible to compare "the pain and enjoyments of one man...against those of many men of blunter capacity." As his speech continued, it became clear that the "men" who Harper believed possessed a "blunter capacity" to feel were people of African descent. Harper detailed for his audience some of the "distinguishing characteristics" of black people, including what he believed was their "want of domestic affections, and insensibility to the ties of kindred." Harper was willing to concede that there might

"be found among them some of superior capacity to many white persons; but...in general their capacity is very limited, and their feelings animal and coarse – fitting them peculiarly to discharge the lower, and merely mechanical offenses of society."⁷⁴

Here the implications of Harper's argument crystallized: because people of African descent had the "very limited...feelings" of an "animal," they were perfectly suited to

⁷⁴ Drew Gilpin Faust, ed., *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981) 79; William Harper "Harper's Memoir on Slavery" *The Pro-Slavery Argument*, 17, 56-59

servitude, and similar menial labor. Harper's theory of racialized emotions not only justified slavery, but the division of families, as he claimed that those with "insensibility to the ties of kindred" could hardly be expected to grieve if their family was separated by death or slave auction. As his speech reveals, there were far-reaching emotional, physical and economic consequences to the theory that people of African descent had less capacity to feel.

This passage speaks volumes about the anxieties members of the planter class had about the emotions of slaves, and their concerns about explaining how and why the emotions differed by race. Harper's ideas were not only embraced, they had staying power: his speech was published in pamphlet form in 1838, but its ideas were seen as powerful enough that they were reprinted as the opening essay of *The Pro-Slavery Argument* published in 1852.⁷⁵ This invites many questions: why were these theories so enduring and what purposes did they serve? How did proslavery and antislavery writers alike construct and defend these ideas of race-based emotional differences? How did enslaved people and former slaves respond to these theories?

Members of the planter class were not the only ones arguing that slaves experienced emotions differently; former slaves also claimed there were emotional differences, albeit with another axis of difference and an opposing political goal. While the planter elite and proslavery advocates viewed these emotional differences as fixed and rooted in race, authors of slave narratives argued that differing capacities to feel related to free status. Just as the champions of slavery marshaled these claims to promote slavery as a necessary and useful institution, and to argue against universal emancipation,

⁷⁵ Drew Gilpin Faust, ed., *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1860*, 79

former slaves emphasized their affective depth to challenge the emotional and physical brutality of slavery. In the short term, slaveholders used their views to shape the emotional restrictions of the antebellum South, strictures that governed how enslaved people as well as free people of all races ought to act. But these theories of racialized emotional norms would have long-term implications as well, as the prospect of emancipation threatened the emotional rubric that slaveholders had come to rely upon to preserve the racial order of the Antebellum South.

It is no accident that Harper believed that one way to defend slavery was to prove that people of African descent were constitutively emotionally different from whites. As Molly Rogers claims, there were a number of ways that “slavery’s legions of intellectual defenders” justified slavery, including religious, economic, and historical arguments, but “nothing sustained slavery’s defense quite as effectively as arguments from ‘nature’ – the natural, biological destiny of the darker races to labor in the soil.”⁷⁶ Physicians and scientists like Samuel A. Cartwright, Samuel Morton, Josiah C. Nott, and Louis Agassiz came to prominence in the 1830s and 1840s for their work on the biological basis of race and the attendant essential and innate differences between the races. Cartwright and scientific writers like John H. Van Evrie and George S. Sawyer were instrumental in popularizing these academic theories, bringing the principles of scientific racism to the masses.⁷⁷ Proslavery advocates and white supremacists more generally were turning to

⁷⁶ Molly Rogers *Delia’s Tears: Race, Science, and Photography in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010) ix; For more discussion of the rise of scientific racism to defend slavery, see George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1971) and Drew Gilpin Faust ed. *The Ideology of Slavery*

⁷⁷ I am most interested in the arguments of proslavery ideology and ethnology to the extent to which they were used in the service of constructing theories of racialized emotional differences. For more on proslavery ideology and race theory see William Sumner Jenkins, *Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South* (1935; reprint ed., Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1960); George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the*

science in order to make and strengthen their claims about racial difference, and their implications for slavery. In an era obsessed with sentiment and sincerity, it is little wonder then that this rhetoric was used to articulate not only the physical differences but also the emotional differences that planters and other champions of slavery perceived between the races.⁷⁸

In his work on emotions and race in Antebellum frontier romances, Ezra Tawil claims that this significant "moment when scientific discourse was becoming increasingly concerned with the biological differences among types of bodies," marked a shift in interest from outward markers of race to its innermost manifestations. Tawil focuses on frontier romance novels in particular because he argues that they highlight how ideas "about racial conflict began to distinguish the 'races' on the basis of their emotional rather than exclusively physical properties." According to Tawil, as they became more preoccupied by claims about the physical differences of the races, early 19th century Americans began to view race as internal, not just externally legible.⁷⁹ The shift to

White Mind; William R. Stanton *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes Toward Race in America, 1815-1859* (1960; reprint ed., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of American Slavery in America, 1701-1840* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1990); Winthrop Jordan *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550 - 1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968); Bruce Dain *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); See George M. Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind* 86-87 for a discussion of how ideas about scientific racism became more widely disseminated.

⁷⁸ For more on the period's obsession with sentiment and sincerity see Karen Halttunen *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830 - 1870*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); Fay Bound Alberti "Bodies, Hearts, and Minds: Why Emotions Matter to Historians of Science and Medicine" *Isis* 100-4 (December 2009) 798-810; Steven M. Stowe *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); Mary Chapman and Glenn Handler, eds *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999)

⁷⁹ In particular Tawil looks at how many white Americans worked through changing ideas about race by turning to reading frontier romances, in the hopes that "fictional narratives could offer narrative solutions to a political crisis during a period when political discourse was curiously unable to do so." Authors like Harriet Beecher Stow and James Fennimore Cooper used prose to explore the "sentimental properties attached to race." Tawil claims that these authors were writing with the view that each race possessed a racially distinct "psychological and emotional interior" which he refers to as "racial sentiment." He claims

viewing people's sentiments as a sign of race was evident in the ways that proslavery and antislavery authors described emotions, such as Thomas Roderick Dew's description of "black passions" in his 1832 defense of slavery.⁸⁰ Though Dew used the word "black" to mean malevolent, it is difficult not to see dual meanings in his language when applied to the emotional fitness of people of African descent.

Ezra Tawil suggests that the idea of racialized emotional difference had a precedent in "ancient writings on human diversity" by authors like Hippocrates and in work on the "theory of the humors."⁸¹ Though these ideas were by no means new, they would gain political traction as the institution of slavery expanded with the growth of the American colonies. Roughly half a century before Harper spoke of racialized emotional difference in South Carolina, Thomas Jefferson's famed "Notes on the State of Virginia" explored the topic of race and its defining characteristics.⁸² He catalogued what he perceived as physical differences between the races, observing that "The first difference

that "when these authors wrote about 'white people' and 'Indians,' they referred not only to 'color' as we understand the term, but to different capacities for feeling." Ezra Tawil *The Making of Racial Sentiment: Slavery and the Birth of the Frontier Romance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 2, 3, 11, 50; While Tawil's ideas are very useful for me, I am more concerned with the evolution of conceptions of what he terms "racial sentiment" outside of literature, how these debates were taking place amongst slaveholders, between slaveholders and slaves, and amongst slaves, particularly in slave narratives.

⁸⁰ Thomas Roderick Dew "Professor Dew on Slavery" *The Pro-Slavery Argument*, 452; Drew Gilpin Faust ed. *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South*, 8, 21 - 22

⁸¹ According to Tawil, in such texts "we often find humoral theory standing in where the modern reader expects to find racist assumptions about human difference." Ezra Tawil *The Making of Racial Sentiment*, 50

⁸² First written in 1781 as a response to a French survey about the American colonies, and intended for a French readership, Jefferson edited *Notes* several times in the ensuing years before the book became more widely available in America. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on The State of Virginia, With an Appendix* (Boston, 1801) For more on *Notes on The State of Virginia* see David Tucker *Enlightened Republicanism: A Study of Jefferson's Notes on the State of Virginia* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008) and Richard B. Bernstein *Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), in particular Chapter 3.

Interestingly, though on paper William Harper shared many of Jefferson's theories about the inherent emotional differences of the races, Drew Gilpin Faust notes that "Harper attacked the Revolutionary heritage" of slavery and even slaveholding Founding Fathers like Jefferson for what he called their "well-sounding but unmeaning verbiage of natural equality and inalienable rights." In particular, proslavery advocates like Harper and T.R. Dew took exception with the inalienable right to "Life, Liberty and Pursuit of Happiness." Drew Gilpin Faust ed. *The Ideology of Slavery*, 78-79

which strikes us is that of colour,” which may have been caused by differing amounts of “bile, or ...some other secretion,” before expounding upon hair texture and even the idea that people of African descent “secrete less by the kidnies, and more by the glands of the skin.” But Jefferson also argued that race was more than skin (or bile) deep. He asked:

“is this difference of no importance...Are not the fine mixtures of red and white, the expressions of every passion by greater or less suffusions of colour in the one, preferable to that eternal monotony, which reigns in the countenances, that immoveable veil of black which covers all the emotions of the other race?”⁸³

Though Jefferson may not have been certain about what caused the spectrum of shades of skin, he argued that the “difference” in color was crucial as a barometer of emotions because skin was the canvas for “the fine mixtures of red and white,” or blushing. He suggested not only that white skin was “preferable” because it reveals the emotions through blushing, he hinted that because the ability to blush was concealed by an immovable veil of black” skin, that the emotions of people of color were unknowable, inscrutable. By linking the emotions and the skin so closely he implied that the inherent transparency and immutability of white emotions was further proof of whites’ supremacy. But he was not only claiming that one’s skin color was a reflection of one’s general emotional state, he insinuated that black people were incapable of blushing physically or emotionally.

Jefferson then delved more explicitly into the topic of race-based emotional difference, arguing that slaves experienced love in different ways from white people. He claimed that slaves were “more ardent after their female: but love seems with them to be more an eager desire, than a tender delicate mixture of sentiment and sensation.” Lest one think that “more ardent” love was commendable, Jefferson explained that what enslaved

⁸³ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on The State of Virginia*, Query XIV, “Laws”

people felt was the “eager desire” of lust, which he implied was a degraded form of affection, not as nuanced as “a tender delicate mixture of sentiment and sensation.”

Jefferson continued, claiming that slaves also felt sorrow in different ways, writing that

“Their griefs are transient. Those numberless afflictions, which render it doubtful whether heaven has given life to us in mercy or in wrath, are less felt, and sooner forgotten with them. In general, their existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection.”⁸⁴

Here Jefferson suggested not only that slaves had less capacity to feel emotions either intensely, or for any duration, he argued that they lacked interiority, and were more intent on “sensation than reflection,” valuing the physical over the psychological (and of course seemingly divorcing the former from the latter).

Jefferson’s writings also highlight the ways in which racialized theories about emotions could be implemented to further the aims of white supremacy. It is in his discussion of slaves’ capacity to love that the ramifications of Jefferson’s theories become most clear. In theorizing that enslaved men were “more ardent” and experienced more of “an eager desire” than “a tender delicate mixture of sentiment and sensation,” he conjured up the caricature of the hypersexualized person of color. Jefferson was just one of many authors who would make similar claims that people of African descent felt lust rather than “tender” and “delicate” romantic love, claims which would have far-reaching implications. Once such authors had declared that enslaved people did not experience the same love or familial affection the relationships between enslaved people could be ignored, families could be divided, and enslaved women could be sexually abused with impunity.⁸⁵ Later writers might have different explanations for why, how and what slaves

⁸⁴ Thomas Jefferson, “Notes on The State of Virginia,” Query XIV, “Laws”

⁸⁵ Slave narratives provide insight into the impacts of ideas that enslaved people lacked “domestic affections.” When Henry Brown’s wife and children were about to be sold away from him, Brown pleaded with the man not to separate them. Brown recalled that the man was unmoved, and suggested that Brown

felt, and different political aims for those arguments, but Jefferson's writing reveals the extent to which emotional differences were believed to be based on race, and intrinsic.

The writing of a Massachusetts clergyman (and Harvard alum), Timothy Flint, shows that theories about racialized emotional difference were sometimes constructed through comparisons between American Indians and people of African descent. As a missionary in the lower Mississippi River Valley in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, Flint described the Native American population of the area, and spent some time contrasting their emotions with those of enslaved people.⁸⁶ Flint opined that Native Americans, whom he termed "moody... sons of the forest,"

"have not the same acute and tender sensibilities with the other races of men. I particularly compare them with a race with which I have often seen them intermixed, - the negroes. They have ...no acute feelings. They do not so easily or readily sympathize with external nature. They seem callous to every passion but rage.... they do not seem susceptible of much affection for their own species or the whites."⁸⁷

Flint's suppositions about the emotions of Native Americans used very similar wording to that of Jefferson's *Notes*, particularly in his discussion of how Indians lacked the "tender sensibilities" possessed by other races. The perception that Native Americans were apathetic and emotionally detached was not uncommon in the Antebellum period; Mary Chesnut dryly commented that people in her hometown usually "never show any more feeling or sympathy than red Indians. Except at a funeral."⁸⁸ Flint not only focused

"could get another wife and so I need not trouble myself about that one." Henry "Box" Brown *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown* written by himself, introduction by Richard Newman, Foreword by Henry Louis Gates, Jr (New York, (Oxford University Press, 2002) 51

⁸⁶ Arlin Turner "James K. Paulding and Timothy Flint," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Jun., 1947), pp. 105-111

⁸⁷ Timothy Flint *Recollections of the Last Ten Years, Passed in Occasional Residences and Journeyings in the Valley of the Mississippi, From Pittsburg and the Missouri to the Gulf of Mexico, and From Florida to the Spanish Frontier; in A Series of Letters to The Rev. James Flint of Salem, Massachusetts* (Boston: Cummings, Hilliard, and Company, 1826) 137; (Thank you to Katherine Stevens for pointing me towards this source.)

⁸⁸ *Mary Chesnut's Civil War* ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) 78

on the “acute feelings” that Native Americans lacked, he highlighted “rage” as their primary emotion. Flint’s assertion that American Indians bore no “affection for...the whites” spoke to another common theme in the rhetoric of racialized emotional difference: that the races bore an innate hatred for one another.

Flint eventually elaborated further on the relation he saw between the emotions of American Indians, and those of people of African descent, groups that he found to be:

“the two extremes of human nature brought together. The Negro is easily excitable, and in the highest degree susceptible of all the passions; he is more especially so of the mild and gentle affections. To the Indian, stern, silent, moody, ruminating, existence seems a burden. To the Negro, remove only pain and hunger, it is naturally a state of enjoyment. As soon as his burdens are laid down, or his toils for a moment suspended, he sings, he seizes his fiddle, he dances.”⁸⁹

Thus his “two extremes of human nature” were circumscribed by the seeming emotional insensibility of American Indians, and the person of African descent who was “easily excitable.” In condemning Native Americans because they did “not seem susceptible of much affection for their own species or the whites” while also critiquing people of African descent for being “in the highest degree susceptible of all the passions,” Flint implied that there was a race-based emotional spectrum. In the spectrum of emotional control he no doubt imagined whites at the center, neither too “excitable” and easily provoked to emotion, nor too “callous” and unaffected.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Timothy Flint *Recollections of the Last Ten Years* (Boston: Cummings, Hilliard, and Company, 1826) 139-140

⁹⁰ Flint was far from the only author to contrast the emotions of American Indians with those of people of African descent. William Harper compared the emotional capacity of African people unfavorably to that of American Indians, noting that slaves did not possess the “noble sentiments, and contempt of danger which distinguishes the North American tribes and other savages, no traces are to be found among this slothful people.” Frederick Douglass also hinted at the perceptions that Native Americans were more courageous but also difficult to read emotionally. When he recalled how he feared that his plans to run away would be revealed on his visage, he wrote of how he longed to trade his “tell tale face for the immoveable countenance of the Indian.” William Harper “Harper’s Memoir on Slavery” *The Pro-Slavery Argument*, 57; Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 202

In another letter Flint wrote of his “conviction, that the negroes possess a gentle, susceptible, and affectionate nature,” citing as evidence that “Their bosoms are more open to the impressions of religion,

Though some authors were drawn to comparisons of Native American and African emotions, over time proslavery advocates became more concerned with the contrast between white emotions and those of black people. While all proslavery authors writing about emotions agreed that people of African descent fundamentally experienced emotions differently from white people, there were diverging notions about these differences. Did slaves feel less intensely, did they feel happier? And were these emotions innate and thus fixed, or socially constructed?

One of the most common proslavery claims about emotions during the Antebellum period was, as Thomas Jefferson and William Harper argued, that slaves' emotional "capacity is very limited," and so they felt less intensely and less acutely than white people. The slaveholder and proslavery author Edward Pollard emphasized the differences he perceived in the complexity of white and black feelings by subtly contrasting his emotional depth with that of slaves throughout the text of *Black Diamonds*. In discussing the close bonds that he believed existed between slaves and slaveholders, he brought up the example of an enslaved woman who raised him, and how his "eyes are tenderly filled with tears when" he thought "of that dear old slave, and recollect how she loved me in her simple manner."⁹¹ So while the mere memory of a slave he felt close to brought him to "tender...tears," the enslaved woman, by contrast, "loved" him in "her simple manner," suggesting that she possessed less capacity to love, or that her emotions were less nuanced than his own.

than those of the whites." Though here he almost seemed to be comparing the emotions of black people favorably to those of whites, he was still arguing that this supposed "affectionate nature" was rooted in biology, and difference. Timothy Flint *Recollections of the Last Ten Years* (Boston: Cummings, Hilliard, and Company, 1826) 344

⁹¹ Edward A. Pollard *Black Diamonds Gathered in the Darkey Homes of the South* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968) 38-39

Proslavery author George S. Sawyer revealed a great deal about his theories on the simplistic emotions of African slaves in his critique of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Sawyer first took exception to Harriet Beecher Stowe's depiction of black emotions in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* because he believed that they were portrayed as overly complex, and that "The keen susceptibility of such refined feelings" and "exalted" emotions that the character of Topsy displayed were "as much out of place in the bosom of Topsy as the most costly array of precious jewelry, laces and finery would be in her costume." He would go on to say that in "the whole routine of negro literature...drama...speeches" and songs (which he took to "be a correct index...of negro intellect and character") there were no similar "bursts of impassioned feelings of an elevated character."⁹² Clearly people of African descent were expected to possess more simplistic emotions, rather than "refined feelings" that might be "of an elevated character." Later, Sawyer addressed Stowe's description of slaves' familial ties more specifically:

"The authoress of Uncle Tom's Cabin has kindly informed us that emotions of parental and kindred attachment are ardent and strong in the hearts of the negro race, but my experience and observation have led me to form a very different conclusion upon that subject. Lust and beastly cruelty are the strong passions that glow in the negro's bosom."⁹³

Just as Jefferson had almost eighty years before, Sawyer conjectured that people "of the negro race" did not feel "parental and kindred attachment," but were instead governed by "lust" and other "beastly" emotions.

As Sawyer's comment about "beastly cruelty" suggests, one common construct for emphasizing the simplicity of black emotions was to compare slaves' capacity to feel

⁹² George S. Sawyer *Southern Institutes* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1858) 200

⁹³ Ibid, 222. Sawyer emphasized the fact that this theory about the "kindred attachment" of slaves was intended to justify splitting up enslaved families when he later assured his reader that the ads for slaves sales in "the Southern States...almost universally" included "the specification that families are not to be separated." (224)

to that of animals. Sawyer himself explicitly declared that “All the social attachments, sentiments and feelings of the negro are imperfect, and savor rather of animal instinct and impulse, than of intellectual and moral sensibilities.”⁹⁴ Slave narratives like those of Lewis Hayden also provide evidence that the theory that slaves possessed animalistic feelings was widely spread amongst members of the planter class. Hayden observed that “It was commonly reported that my master” Presbyterian minister, Reverend Adam Runkin, “had said in the pulpit that there was no more harm in separating a family of slaves than a litter of pigs.”⁹⁵ As with other thinkers of his day, Runkin drew parallels between the familial connections of slaves and those of animals in order to justify dividing slave families. As a minister, he was in a particularly authoritative position to assuage the guilt of his Lexington, Kentucky congregation, and to set aside any concerns his parishioners had that their slaves might feel the same sorrow they might if their own families were torn asunder. Hayden judiciously continued that he had not heard his master say so himself, “and so cannot say whether this is true or not.” Nevertheless, it was clear that enslaved people were aware that this was how members of the planter class viewed their emotions.

Hayden’s comments also highlight the fact that the trope of black emotions as animalistic was most often employed to dismiss the affective bonds of enslaved couples and families. Harriet Jacobs wrote that after she ran away her owner’s wife, Mrs. Flint, was heard to say that since Jacobs had fled and left her children, she “hasn’t so much feeling for her children as a cow has for its calf.”⁹⁶ Thus not only was Jacobs accused of

⁹⁴ Ibid, 197

⁹⁵ John W. Blassingame *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998)

⁹⁶ Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc.) 86-87

not loving her children, Mrs. Flint hinted that the maternal sentiments of enslaved women like Jacobs were so inadequate as to be more comparable to the emotional and parenting capability of an animal. Even Fanny Kemble, who was generally sympathetic to the plight of the enslaved mothers she encountered, observed that the children on her husband's plantation were "filthy" and "wretched," because of their "negligent, ignorant, wretched mothers," who exhibited "apparent indifference to the plight of their offspring."⁹⁷ Of course, whenever slaveholders or slave traders assumed that enslaved women were not maternal or didn't care if they lost their children to death or sale, what they were really assuming was that those enslaved women had less capacity to feel than a white mother. Interestingly, in spite of the perception that slaves lacked maternal feeling, enslaved women were nevertheless charged with caring for black and white children alike on many plantations.

Closely tied to the argument that slaves had limited emotional capabilities was the claim that because of their simpler feelings, people of African descent were not only happy, but also happier than white people, or as Thomas Roderick Dew said in his defense of slavery, "the happiest of the human race."⁹⁸ (I will explore the myth of the happy slave further in another chapter) In his writings about his travels through the South, Frederick Olmsted hinted at a link between slaves' happiness and their limited emotional acuity. Olmsted declared: "I do not believe there are any other people in the world with whom the Negro would be as contented, and, if contentment is happiness, so happy, as with those who are now his masters."⁹⁹ Of course this almost hints that "Negroes" might not be disposed to be happy, but to the extent that they are capable of

⁹⁷ Frances Anne Kemble *Journal of a Residence On a Georgian Plantation In 1838-1839*, 60

⁹⁸ Thomas Roderick Dew "Professor Dew on Slavery" *The Pro-Slavery Argument*, 442, 459, 460

⁹⁹ Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom*, 614

happiness with “any people in the world,” he supposed them to be most “contented” to be enslaved by their masters. Edward Pollard also discussed slaves’ happiness and their limited feelings in the same breath, remarking how slaves “have their little prides and passions, their amusements, their pleasantries, which constitute the same sum of happiness as in the lives of their masters.”¹⁰⁰ Interestingly, Pollard simultaneously trivialized the emotions of slaves (referring to their emotions as “*little* prides and passions”) and suggested that slaves were seemingly capable of attaining just as much overall “happiness as...their masters.” Pollard was not contradicting himself by labeling slaves as less emotionally nuanced and yet capable of equal amounts of happiness. Rather Pollard argued that though slaves felt all emotions, positive or negative, less intensely than a white person, then they ultimately achieved the “same sum” of total happiness. This passage highlights how much time Pollard spent musing over the topic of feelings, and the fact that he seemingly could not contemplate how slaves felt without thinking of his own sentiments (and as one sees later in the text, he could not discuss his own emotions without discussing enslaved people.)

The writing of Fanny Kemble and James Stirling suggests that anti-slavery (but nonetheless white supremacist) writers were more likely to argue that people of African descent were emotionally different not because they were happier, but because they were inherently more sorrowful than white people. Kemble spent a great deal of time mulling over “all the miseries of which this accursed system of slavery is the cause.” She claimed that she had “found the slaves on this plantation” to possess:

“a mixture of sadness and fear, the involuntary exhibition of the two feelings, which I suppose must be the predominant experience of their whole lives, regret and apprehension... a sense of incalculable past loss

¹⁰⁰ Edward A. Pollard *Black Diamonds*, 25

and injury, and a dread of incalculable future loss and injury.”¹⁰¹ Kemble didn’t just think that slaves feel differently, she insinuated that their different feelings were constitutive of slavery, the “predominant experience” of bondage, in particular “sadness and fear.” According to historian Elizabeth Clark, Kemble’s adulation of sorrow reflected the emphasis on the “suffering slave” in antislavery texts of the 1830s. For Kemble and for contemporary abolitionists these emotions defined slavery, and enslaved people.¹⁰² It is notable that amidst her assumptions about the emotional lives of enslaved people, she observed that their pain and sorrow were “incalculable,” though she did not clarify if they were incalculable to the outside observer, or to the slaves themselves. Similarly, the British author James Stirling’s antislavery leanings were in evidence in his description of the emotional state of the enslaved people he encountered in the South during his 1856 tour of the United States. He had been told that the slaves in the border states were “the best treated” but Stirling asserted that “they are not happy. The slave physiognomy, even in Kentucky, struck me as depressed, and in some places gloomy.”¹⁰³ As with the proslavery authors who turned to ethnology to support their claims about racial difference, Stirling cited “physiognomy,” the belief that one’s inner character and feelings could be determined by their physical appearance, in particular, the face, to counter proslavery claims that enslaved people were content. While Kemble and Stirling were not necessarily arguing that enslaved people had a decreased capacity to feel, they were still viewing the emotions slaves felt as limited

¹⁰¹ Frances Anne Kemble *Journal of a Residence On a Georgian Plantation In 1838-1839*, Beehive Foundation, Library of Georgia, Savannah, 1992, pp. 49-50

¹⁰² Elizabeth Clark “‘The Sacred Rights of the Weak’: Pain, Sympathy, and the Culture of Individual Rights in Antebellum America” *The Journal of American History* 82-2 (Sept., 1995) 463-493, 464-468

¹⁰³ James Stirling *Letters From the Slave States* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969) 49

(limited now to feelings of “sadness” and “gloom”) and positing that people of color felt inherently differently.

In another departure from the ideology of her neighboring planters, Fanny Kemble believed that most of the emotional differences between blacks and whites were based on socialization rather than biology. In her journal she contemplated “the manner of the negroes,” as she “was constantly struck with the insolent tyranny of their demeanor toward each other,” which she believed was “a universal characteristic...of the negroes.” But, she followed this catalogue of prejudices with the observation that:

“These detestable qualities, which I constantly hear attributed to them as innate and inherent in their race, appear to me the direct result of their condition,” and “as many” people would be found to have the same traits “under similar circumstances, among the same number of white people.”¹⁰⁴

Here Kemble made some interesting assertions. Clearly she had been privy to a number of conversations in which she heard other planters declare the traits of enslaved people to be “innate and inherent.” Despite her obvious bias in claiming that she only saw enslaved people behave cruelly to one another, she did, unlike others of the time, suggest that any poor behavior in people of color was the result of nurture, not nature. Thus she posited that interior qualities like the ability to nurture or be cruel were found in slaves, but because of conditioning, not because of a biological imperative. It is unclear to what extent Kemble shared these ideas with her planter acquaintances, however, in later conversations her neighbors acknowledged that some of slaves’ temperaments stemmed from their external conditions, rather than their biology. During one of many visits to the nearby home of the Coupers, Kemble noted that her neighbors had generally all been:

“in favor of the sweetness of temper and natural gentleness of disposition of the negroes; but these characteristics they seemed to think less inherent

¹⁰⁴ Frances Anne Kemble *Journal of a Residence On a Georgian Plantation In 1838-1839*, 143

than the result of diet and the other lowering influences of their condition .”¹⁰⁵ It is notable that when her neighbors were willing to concede that some slaves exhibited a favorable “disposition” or “sweetness,” they attributed these qualities to their *own* behavior, claiming that their slaves’ emotional behavior was based on what “diet” they feed their slaves. This was a quintessential display of how slaveholders tried to establish their emotional mastery of their slaves, by believing that they could control how their slaves felt emotionally as well as physically through a variety of their own actions.

According to George Fredrickson in *Black Image in The White Mind*, an intellectual history of racial thought in America in the nineteenth century, a number of antislavery thinkers were employing ideas of social environmentalism, which he defines as “the belief that human character and values are shaped or predetermined by social and cultural conditions,” to critique the racial hierarchies of slavery. These arguments about socialization were often evident in newspapers touting colonization efforts, though Fredrickson is quick to point out that these theories “can be put to extremely conservative use.”¹⁰⁶ As with Fanny Kemble, the supporters of colonization were sometimes (but not always) opposed to slavery, but also often quite racist. While Kemble’s theories about social environmentalism could perhaps be attributed to her opposition to slavery, there were proslavery advocates who also spoke about slaves as products of their social environments. Even more confusingly, many proslavery authors asserted that the emotions of people of African descent were socially or environmentally constructed in conjunction with the claim that they were inherent qualities.

¹⁰⁵ Frances Anne Kemble *Journal of a Residence On a Georgian Plantation In 1838-1839*, 155

¹⁰⁶ George M. Fredrickson *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1971) 26

Throughout his speech on slavery William Harper made references to the fact that a number of racial traits, including the emotions, were intrinsic and biologically constructed. Not long after declaring that “the races differ in every bone and muscle, and in the proportion of brain and nerves,” he further emphasized the fact that emotions were innate with his statement that “the greatest source of human misery is not in external circumstances, but in men themselves.”¹⁰⁷ Harper’s assertion that emotions were an inborn quality rather than a product of “external circumstances” would seem to put him at odds with social environmentalism, yet later in the speech he seemed to negate himself. Despite his theory that the “very limited” capacity to feel was inherent to people of African descent, he also told his audience that the “savage life” of Africans was characterized by “furious passions,” and that “Slavery is an essential process in emerging from savage life.” Thus he argued that slavery as a “process” helped to curb the “furious passions” of Creolized Africans. According to Harper, people of African descent benefited from being enslaved, because in bondage they were “protected” from one another’s “vengeful passions.” Later Harper noted that one “rarely heard of...an atrocious crime committed by a slave...since they have worn off the savage character which their progenitors brought with them from Africa.”¹⁰⁸ Through slavery he seemed to believe that people of African descent were able to learn to control their emotions and morals.

Other authors also vacillated on the subject of whether or not emotions were biologically or socially constructed, seemingly concluding that the feelings and characteristics of people of African descent could be shaped by society, to a point.

¹⁰⁷ William Harper “Harper’s Memoir on Slavery” *The Pro-Slavery Argument*, 17, 21

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 19, 29, 38-39

Thomas Roderick Dew generally seemed to believe that human's "habits and sentiments" were social constructs, "the growth of adventitious causes" and "circumstances." If anything differed between one human being and another, it would, in his view, be caused by their particular material conditions and external "circumstances." Later in the text he was more specific about how the "habits and sentiments" of people of African descent born in the United States had been shaped by slavery: "the Negro has imbibed the principles, the sentiments, and feelings of the white; in one word, he is civilized - at least comparatively." Thus if external factors shaped how one felt, and if "the Negro" was able to adopt the "feelings of the white" over time, then what Dew seemed to suggest was that the emotional difference he perceived between white and black people would disappear with time. But in spite of this claim that emotions were a product of social conditions, he seemed to see this construction of sentiments as a surprisingly static process. Dew justified the perpetuation of slavery and the disenfranchisement of black people through his argument that "The blacks have now all the habits and feelings of slaves, the whites have those of masters; the prejudices are formed, and mere legislation can not improve them."¹⁰⁹ This implied that perhaps blacks had developed the "feelings of slaves" over time through the conditions of slavery, but these "habits" were now fixed, and even free, former slaves would retain these "feelings of slaves," which would make universal emancipation a disastrous proposition.

Proslavery advocates were not the only ones espousing seemingly contradictory ideas about whether or not physical and emotional racial traits were the product of nature or nurture. After the Swiss scientist Louis Agassiz immigrated to the United States in the 1840s he became interested in the subject of race and racial classifications. Agassiz

¹⁰⁹ Thomas Roderick Dew "Professor Dew on Slavery" *The Pro-Slavery Argument*, 294, 463, 435

looked to the development of animal and plant life to hypothesize “that specific differences within the plant and animal kingdom were the result of separate creations dictated by the environmental demands of differing regions of the earth.” Like the famed American scientists and physicians Samuel Morton and Josiah Nott, Agassiz was making a case for the multiple origins of human kind, known as “polygenesis.” This theory was popular with many proslavery advocates and white supremacists alike because it posited that the various races were each a different species. Polygenesis was controversial however, because it refuted “the accepted Biblical view of the origin of all races in the progeny of Adam.” Agassiz’s hypothesis that the races had different origins and were shaped “by the environmental demands” in which they developed seemed to support social environmentalism, but his theories were also believed to “affirm... the permanence of race characteristics within what was then the accepted chronology of human life on the earth.”¹¹⁰ So according to Agassiz, the various races had developed over time as a result of their social and environmental conditions, but these traits took long enough to appear and to change as to be essentially fixed.

Frederickson points out that Dew seemed to negate his own arguments, in declaring both that “black behavior” was “predetermined by innate racial traits,” and that “Negro characteristics were simply acquired habits of servility.”¹¹¹ But given that other proslavery authors like Pollard and Harper as well as supporters of polygenesis like Agassiz also seemed to vacillate between the two views, it seems that perhaps proslavery authors did not see their belief that racialized emotional differences were biological *and*

¹¹⁰ George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 75, 82, 75; For more discussion of polygenesis see Chapter 3 in Frederickson.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 45-46

socially constructed as a contradiction.¹¹² So how could these various writers selectively see some traits as static, while others were subject to social conditions? Frederickson suggests that this was not a contradiction at all, but “a program of preventive action.” He claims that “The notion that bestial savagery constituted the basic Negro character” while “the loyal ‘Sambo’ figure was a social product of slavery” helped to allay slaveholders concerns about how to feel about slaves. If slavery altered people of African descent for the better, then slaveholders could safely display “a conditional ‘affection’ for the Negro.”¹¹³ The same dynamic undergirded claims about the emotional capacity of Africans versus those of Creolized slaves. In fact, for defenders of slavery, the seemingly contradictory theories that emotions were intrinsic and that they were socialized worked best in concert. Believing that emotions were biological obviously served the proslavery argument that whites were inherently emotionally separate from and superior to people of African descent. But by claiming that the feelings of people of African descent could be *also* still be improved through slavery, proslavery ideologues could not only defend slavery as a necessary and benevolent institution, they could argue that other Africans would benefit from its auspices. Pollard used this very logic to defend re-opening the international slave trade, assuring his reader that:

“imported savage slaves from Africa...would prove tractable, and that we would find in them, or would soon develop, the same traits of courage, humor, and tenderness, which distinguish the character of the pure negro everywhere.”¹¹⁴

¹¹² Slave narrative author Lunsford Lane spoke of a member of the planter class whose behavior seemed contradictory, explaining that anyone who thought the man seemed “like a riddle...should remember that men, like other things, have ‘two sides,’ and often a top and bottom in addition.” Lunsford Lane in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968) iv

¹¹³ Of course, according to Frederickson, the condition was that “As a slave he was lovable, but as a freedman he would be a monster.” George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 54-55

¹¹⁴ Edward A. Pollard *Black Diamonds Gathered in the Darkey Homes of the South* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968) 58

Once again, he seemed to make competing claims that the emotions of people of African descent were innate, but also “tractable” enough to “develop” over time. But this paradox enabled Pollard to maintain his position that slaves felt fundamentally differently than white people, while also arguing that exposure to slavery would advance “savage” Africans enough to justify the renewal of the international slave trade. Perhaps to pad his case, he stated that the desirable qualities of “the pure negro” such as “courage, humor and tenderness” could be developed even in “savage slaves from Africa,” while hinting that the traits that made Africans “savage” would evolve away. Regardless of any ideological fissures, such as the controversy between supporters of polygenesis and monogenesis, or any conflicting ideas about whether racialized emotional differences were intrinsic or socially constructed, these thinkers were in agreement that people of color felt differently, and that this justified their continued enslavement.

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Interestingly, members of the planter class and white supremacists were not the only ones arguing that black slaves in the words of Ezra Tawil “feel different things, and feel things differently,” former slaves were making a similar claim of constitutively different emotions.¹¹⁵ However, while the claims of authors like Harper, Dew, Jefferson and Pollard focused on emotions that differed by race, the authors of slave narratives suggested that the fundamental factor was one’s status as free or enslaved. Former slaves wrote about the different feelings that were experienced by slaves as well as the fact that different emotions were permissible to slaves, suggesting that these claims were both about what slaves felt and about the emotions they were required to display to the world.

¹¹⁵ Ezra Tawil *The Making of Racial Sentiment*, 2

As I will show, claims of emotional difference for enslaved people were also used to refute claims that people of African descent had more limited feelings, or felt inherently and perpetually happier.

In his narrative of his life and escape from slavery, William Craft seemed hyper-aware that the sheer fact of being enslaved compelled him to enact a different set of emotional expressions than he would as a free person. This was evident in his description of the day that he and his sister were parted on the auction block, which he recalled with fury and sorrow. When the auctioneer denied Craft's request to say goodbye to his sister, he recalled that it:

“sent red-hot indignation darting like lightning through every vein. It quenched my tears, and appeared to set my brain on fire, and made me crave for power to avenge our wrongs! But, alas! we were only slaves, and had no legal rights; consequently we were compelled to smother our wounded feelings, and crouch beneath the iron heel of despotism.”¹¹⁶

Despite Craft's feelings of “indignation” and tearful sadness at being denied his family, he seemed to recognize that without the “power to avenge our wrongs” he needed to temper his display of emotions. His statement also suggests that if they had “legal rights” as citizens, they wouldn't be forced to “smother our wounded feelings.” To be free, therefore, was to be able to exercise a full range of emotional expressions without restriction, to exhibit what William Reddy refers to as “emotional liberty.”¹¹⁷ This is not to suggest that enslaved people did not believe they could experience happiness until they

¹¹⁶ William Craft *Running a Thousand Miles For Freedom; or, the Escape of William and Ellen Craft From Slavery*, 13

¹¹⁷ Reddy defines “emotional liberty” as “the freedom to change” one's emotional “goals.” According to Reddy, the range of emotional expressions that are considered normative and permissible can be used to judge how free or tolerant a social or political institution or “regime” is. Societies which are more tolerant permit a wider range of emotions and allow for emotional transgression and experimentation, and a greater degree of freedom for the individual to navigate or manage their own feelings, while the most repressive societies are those that allow a limited range of emotions, and punish transgressors by inducing “emotional suffering.” *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 129; I will discuss this further in my final chapter on the emotional politics of freedom.

were free, but that slaves were aware that while they were in bondage they were expected to perform certain emotions.

Many authors of slave narratives wrote about the specific emotions that enslaved people experienced while in bondage, focusing on the ways that these feelings were rooted in the institution of slavery, and not in biology. The subject of the all-too-frequent division of enslaved families moved Josiah Henson to contemplate how slavery shaped the emotional landscape of enslaved people. He observed that he could not “refrain from the bitterest feelings of hatred of the system and those who sustain it,” before asking his reader “What else, indeed, can be the feeling of the slave.”¹¹⁸ While Henson hinted that it would be impossible *not* to bear these “bitterest feelings” towards the institution of slavery, and all “those who sustain it,” he was clear that this enmity was based on “the system” of slavery, and was not essential or innate. The former slave Reverend John Sella Martin used similar language to describe how he faced the loss of his family through a sense of solidarity with “my suffering fellow-bondsmen, and hatred of the system that oppressed us.”¹¹⁹ Frederick Douglass also argued that emotions were triggered by slavery rather than race, but he was even clearer about the ways that these emotions were tied to the institution of slavery rather than to the specific experience of bondage that an enslaved person endured. He recalled how he began to hate slavery as a youth, and noted that

"My feelings were not the result of any marked cruelty in the treatment I received; they sprang from my consideration of being a slave at all. It was *slavery* - not its mere *incidents* - that I hated."¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Josiah Henson *The life of Josiah Henson: formerly a slave, now an inhabitant of Canada*, 1849, 28

¹¹⁹ Sella Martin in John W. Blassingame *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998) 702, 708

¹²⁰ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 119

Here he suggested that it was not the conditions of slavery but the fact of enslavement that shaped his emotions. He implied that *all* slaves, regardless of the specific conditions they endured, as house slaves or field slaves, would have their emotions defined by "being a slave at all." Douglass also took exception to the notion that racial antipathies in particular were innate, pointing out that while "Some people" believed "there is a natural, an inherent, and an invincible repugnance in the breast of the white race toward dark-colored people...My experience, both serious and mirthful, combats this conclusion."¹²¹ Perhaps Douglass suspected that theories of racialized emotional difference were maintained in part through another claim about emotions and race: that white people were born with "an invincible repugnance" towards people of color.

In spite of Douglass' claim that the specific conditions of one's enslavement did not influence the emotions as much as the sheer fact of being enslaved, he later highlighted the differences between how free and enslaved people felt when he wrote about seeking out wage work while a slave. He described being hired out by Hugh Auld as a situation that "was decidedly in my master's favor...He received all the benefits of slaveholding without its evils; while I endured all the evils of a slave, and suffered all the care and anxiety of a freeman."¹²² So perhaps it was possible to take on some of the feelings of a free person depending upon one's specific experience as a slave. Douglass emphasized the tensions of this scenario for his reader by highlighting the fact that while he had seemingly been given the freedom of hiring out his labor, (a privilege which he hoped would ultimately assist in his plans to runaway) he received no

¹²¹ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 296

¹²² Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (New York: Barnes and Noble Classics) 90

“benefits” of being free. Instead, he only felt the negative emotions associated with freedom, those of “care and anxiety.” Similarly, Harriet Jacobs discussed how an enslaved person could have the “feelings” of a free person depending on their experience as a slave. Jacobs noted that because her enslaved father was trained as a “mechanic,” the skills and increased freedoms he had as a tradesman meant that he “had more of the feelings of a Freeman than is common among slaves.”¹²³ By believing that one’s lived experience of slavery was linked to one’s emotional immersion in slavery Jacobs suggested that slavery was an emotional state as well as a legal status. Though Douglass might disagree with her assertion that the conditions of slavery shaped one’s feelings about slavery, they were still both contending that the emotions of enslaved people differed from those of free people.

Solomon Northrup had a particularly unique take on the question of the relationship between free status and emotions, having spent the first thirty two years of his life as a free man before being kidnapped and enslaved for twelve years. In looking back at his life before he was forced into slavery, Northrup recalled meeting slaves at the hotel where he worked, and wondering about their emotional lives, since they would often confess to him their “secret desire for liberty.” He compared their emotions to how he felt, because, as a free man, he was “conscious that I possessed the same feelings and affections that find a place in the white man's breast.”¹²⁴ Throughout the text of his narrative Northrup would cling to his emotional sense of self, and the recollection of the emotional liberty he had as a free person seemed to help him to endure slavery. Though at times his depiction of how other slaves felt was condescending, he was clear throughout the text that the vast

¹²³ Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc.) 11

¹²⁴ Solomon Northrup Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa*, 232

majority of slaves (“ninety-nine out of hundred”) held “in their bosom the love of freedom,” and are “intelligent enough to understand” the concepts of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” which they were denied. From this vantage point Northup was unequivocal in his avowal that free status, not race, governed one’s emotions.¹²⁵

Elizabeth Keckley’s post-war narrative about obtaining freedom from slavery and working for President Lincoln’s family included an interesting exception to the idea that emotional difference was based on free status rather than race. Keckley openly discussed how she had been sexually abused as a slave, and how her white rapist impregnated her. She described her mixed-race child, observing that “The Anglo-Saxon blood as well as the African flowed in his veins...one singing of freedom, the other silent and sullen with generations of despair.”¹²⁶ Notably, Keckley portrayed the emotions in seemingly biological terms, as something that coursed through one’s “veins” and was essentially determined by race, with the “African” blood “sullen,” and characterized by “despair.” Yet she also believed that the emotional experience of her child was determined by the blend of his “Anglo-Saxon” relatives’ “freedom,” and “generations” of suffering on the part of his “African” ancestors, forged over time by the conditions of slavery. For Keckley the emotions were both something that was in one’s blood, and based on “generations” of socialization. Regardless of how she conceived of this difference being formed, Keckley suggested that free people felt fundamentally differently than “African” or enslaved people.

¹²⁵ Northup also became one of many authors who would cite the preamble to voice opposition to slavery, or to advocate for civil rights for Blacks. See for example W.E.B. Du Bois *The Souls of Black Folk* ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Terri Hume Oliver (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999) 45

¹²⁶ Elizabeth Keckley *Behind the Scenes in the Lincoln White House: Memoirs of an African-American Seamstress* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc.) 17

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Faced with the white supremacist rhetoric that people of color felt emotions less intensely, or lacked familial affection altogether, it is little wonder that enslaved people and abolitionist authors of slave narratives responded with their own ideas about the relationship between emotional difference and slavery. According to Nell Irvin Painter, enslaved people forged “countervailing ideologies” in order to combat the oppressive conditions of slavery and discrimination. Painter writes in *Soul Murder and Slavery* that once they had “been identified and set apart as a despised race, slaves found it easier to create alternative ideologies” from those of “the white people who owned them and who told them what to do.”¹²⁷ In response to the prevailing notion that slaves felt less intensely, many authors of slave narratives set about establishing an “alternative ideolog(y)” which argued that emotional difference was tied to slave status rather than race. But they also combated theories that slaves lacked emotional complexity or depth by making a case for the emotional exceptionality of enslaved people, arguing that slaves felt things very intensely, and in fact, *more* intensely than non-slaves. This was primarily asserted through three tropes: through claims that there were certain emotions that could only be experienced by those who had been enslaved, through the notion that language was insufficient to describe the emotions and experiences of enslaved people, and through describing slaveholders as heartless or “unfeeling.”

The first recurring trope of emotional exceptionality in slave narratives was the idea that enslaved emotions were more profound, and thus so intense as to be unknowable to non-slaves. Henry Bibb exemplified this when he assured his reader that

¹²⁷ Nell Irvin Painter *Soul Murder and Slavery, The Fifteenth Charles Edmondson Historical Lectures, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, April 5-6, 1993*, (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 1995) 23

"No one can imagine my feelings in my reflecting moments, but he who has himself been a slave."¹²⁸ In describing her escape to freedom, and how she feared that she might be recaptured and returned to slavery, Harriet Jacobs wrote "Reader, if you have never been a slave you cannot imagine the acute sensation of suffering at my heart."¹²⁹ Josiah Henson employed similar language when he recalled the estate division that occurred after one of his masters passed away. Henson observed that though such cataclysmic events were "common" when masters died, the emotional experience of this division "can never be imagined by those not subject to them, nor recollected by those who have been, without emotions of grief deep and ineffaceable."¹³⁰ While those who had not been enslaved could "never...imagine" the horrors of these divisions Henson stated that these "emotions of grief" left an indelible mark on slaves' memories. In addressing what non-slaves and slaves were capable of feeling in order to convey their individual emotional experiences, these authors were not only highlighting the depth of the emotions of the enslaved, they were portraying their specific emotions as universal to all enslaved people. Speaking for the emotions of all slaves was potentially problematic, as Henson's description of slaves' "ineffaceable" recollections of suffering replicated the claim of writers like Fanny Kemble and James Stirling that slaves were fundamentally emotionally characterized by sorrow.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Henry Bibb Edt Gilbert Osofsky Puttin' On Ole Massa 1969, 66

¹²⁹ Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc.) 160

¹³⁰ Josiah Henson *The life of Josiah Henson: formerly a slave, now an inhabitant of Canada*, 1849, 3

¹³¹ It is impossible to tell if this wording was Henson's own or not, since Henson's narrative was "narrated by himself," as the cover boasted, but "was written from [his] dictation." According to his editor, Samuel Atkins Eliot, "A portion of the story was told, which, when written, was read to him, that any errors of statement might be corrected. The substance of it, therefore, the facts, the reflections, and very often the words, are his; and yet little more than the structure of the sentences belongs to another." Josiah Henson *The life of Josiah Henson*, iii

Frederick Douglass also frequently invoked this trope in his first two autobiographies to describe the singular misery he endured as a slave (as well as the unparalleled joy he experienced). After an attempted group escape, when his co-conspirators were returned from the prison of jail to the incarceration of slavery, yet he was left alone, Douglass wrote "Not until this last separation, dear reader, had I touched those profounder depths of desolation, which it is the lot of slaves often to reach."¹³² Though he was clear in his aside to the reader that this was the first time he had experienced such "depths of desolation," he claimed that it was the "lot" of enslaved people to experience "profounder" pain, and more "often." Interestingly, these indescribable feelings were contrasted with the way he depicted the prejudice he encountered as a free man, when, returning by boat from England, he was denied a first class cabin because of his race. Though he acknowledged that this experience had "a sting for the soul hardly less severe than that which bites the flesh and draws the blood from the back of the plantation slave," in lieu of explaining the event as indescribable or unimaginable, he observed that "The reader will easily imagine what must have been my feelings."¹³³

The construct of the emotional exceptionality of enslaved people was often used to articulate the specific experience of enslaved parents. Before her daughter Ellen was sent to the North, Harriet Jacobs risked leaving hiding to say a tearful goodbye to her. Upon her daughter's departure she recalled that she "heard the gate close after her, with such feelings as only a slave mother can experience." Later, when Jacobs was reunited

¹³² On the brink of escape Douglass observed: "No man can tell the intense agony which is felt by the slave, when wavering on the point of making his escape." Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 207-220

¹³³ *Ibid*, 288

with her son Benjamin in the North, she wrote effusively "O reader, can you imagine my joy? No, you cannot, unless you have been a slave mother."¹³⁴ Henry Bibb also wrote a great deal about the experience of being an enslaved parent. After Malinda and Henry Bibb's daughter was born into slavery (which he swore would be "the first and...the last slave that ever I will father.") and slapped by their mistress, Bibb asked his reader:

"Who can imagine what could be the feelings of a father and mother, when looking upon their infant child whipped and tortured with impunity, and they placed in a situation where they could afford it no protection."¹³⁵

Bibb simultaneously dismissed the idea of trying to conceive of how a parent would feel in this situation, while also placing the reader in the position of the parent "looking upon their infant" and feeling powerless to offer any "protection." Later, after running away, Bibb risked re-capture by coming back to see his wife and child. In recalling the unexpected and touching reunion he claimed that:

"The sensation of joy at that moment flashed like lightning over my afflicted mind, mingled with a thousand dreadful apprehensions, that none but a heart-wounded slave father and husband like myself can possibly imagine."¹³⁶

Once again he argued that it was impossible to even "imagine" the heartbreak felt by enslaved parents, yet his vivid and visceral descriptions of his emotions at this moment seemed designed to provoke an emotional response in his reader. While talking about the very specific emotional experience of enslaved parents and husbands, his rich imagery insured that even readers who had never been enslaved but were themselves parents or spouses could not help but think of their own loved ones. The reader was thus invited to

¹³⁴ Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc.) 116, 133

¹³⁵ Henry Bibb Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa* 1969, 80-81

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, 88

“imagine” these scenes as a parent or spouse even if they could never do so from the perspective of a slave.¹³⁷

As Bibb’s remarks suggest, authors of slave narratives often seemed to simultaneously invoke the reader’s empathy while asserting that identification with enslaved emotions was impossible. When on the eve of escaping slavery, William Wells Brown noted that he could not help but think about the future, and “imagine” his mother at work “in the cotton-field, followed by a merciless task-master” and his “dear sister” being sexually assaulted by “a slave-driver.” This helped paint a picture for his reader of the horrors that women, young and old, faced as slaves, but he was not satisfied to give the reader insight into his awful suppositions. He continued, noting that “None but one placed in such a situation can for a moment imagine the intense agony to which these reflections subjected me.”¹³⁸ It was as though he invited his readers to try to contemplate daily life in slavery by describing its quotidian horrors, before assuring them that only one who has been enslaved could access such emotions.

It is notable that Jacobs and Bibb invoked the emotional exceptionality of being an enslaved parent only when describing the painful separation of their families, and not when describing their tender times together. Perhaps they felt that the pain they endured as enslaved parents, children and siblings was unique, while the love they felt for their family was universal. Writing about the destruction of enslaved family ties rather than

¹³⁷ In his own narrative Henry Brown very explicitly tried to force his readers, in particular his Northern female readership, to imagine themselves as an enslaved parent, writing:

“Mothers of the North! As you gaze upon the fair forms of your idolized little ones, just pause for a moment; how would you feel if you knew that at any time the will of a tyrant...might separate them for ever from your embrace.”

Henry Brown *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown* written by himself, introduction by Richard Newman, Foreword by Henry Louis Gates, Jr (New York, (Oxford Univeristy Press, 2002) 16-17

¹³⁸ William Wells Brown Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1969) 216

how those affective relations developed may also have been a reflection of the abolitionist mode of the day, which, according to Elizabeth Clark, acknowledged that “the depiction of suffering had strategic value” to the antislavery cause.¹³⁹ In any case, their focus on the exceptional suffering of enslaved families suggested that the affective ties of slaves were less rhetorically effective when they flourished, than when they were destroyed.

Just as the argument that slaves were emotionally limited was used by proslavery advocates, the claim that the emotional experience of slavery was unknowable to non-slaves was often used in explicitly antislavery ways, targeted at those who had never been slaves but sought to defend or condemn slavery. In writing about dispelling the myth that slaves were “happier than the free colored citizens of the North,” Solomon Northup attested that only people who had “never drunk, as I have, from the bitter cup of slavery” could make these arguments.¹⁴⁰ If some authors believed that one who had never been a slave could not imagine what it felt like to be a slave, Frederick Douglass argued that it was possible, and necessary, though by no means easy. He warned his reader in his second autobiography:

“It is difficult for a Freeman to enter into the feelings of such fugitives. He cannot see things in the same light with the slave, because he does not, and cannot look from the same point from which the slave does.”¹⁴¹

In his earlier narrative, Douglass shared similar opinions about how “difficult” but important it was to imagine the plight of a fugitive slave when recalling the trials he experienced when he reached the North. He wrote that “It was a most painful situation;

¹³⁹ Elizabeth Clark “‘The Sacred Rights of the Weak’: Pain, Sympathy, and the Culture of Individual Rights in Antebellum America” *The Journal of American History* 82-2 (Sept., 1995) 463-493, 469

¹⁴⁰ Solomon Northup, Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1969) 216

¹⁴¹ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 250

and, to understand it, one must needs experience it, or imagine himself in similar circumstances. Let him be a fugitive slave in a strange land” and experience similar hunger, homelessness and mistrust, “then, and not till then, will he fully appreciate the hardships of, and know how to sympathize with, the toil-worn and whip-scarred fugitive slave.”¹⁴² This suggests that though everyone may not have personal experience with these emotions, that an attempt at empathy was achievable, and was crucial to understanding how to aid slaves. Northup also seemed to suggest that in order to understand slavery one had to understand enslaved emotions. In discussing how authors writing about slavery might exaggerate the life of slaves for better or worse. Northup said of these authors “Let them know the *heart* of the poor slave – learn his secret thoughts” in order to fairly represent the thoughts and experience of slaves in writing. Though the trope of the emotional exceptionality of enslaved people was seemingly characterized by exclusion, Northup and Douglass’ observations also suggest that one of the most important goals of these texts was to provoke the process of empathy in their free readership.

Arguments about slaves’ emotional exceptionality were also used to challenge the laws governing slavery. While proslavery authors like William Harper asserted that slaves lacked “domestic affections” to justify the division of families, Henry Bibb employed the reverse of this claim, that slaves felt more intensely, to make a case for legal slave marriages. He described the suffering endured by enslaved spouses, observing that the “fugitive.... knows from sad experience, what it is to have his wife tyrannically snatched from his bosom” by a slaveholder, “and finally reduced to a state of adultery.” Bibb argued that the frequent but no less heart-rending division of couples and families

¹⁴² Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, 93-94

made slaves uniquely suited to understand and desire the legal bond of matrimony because there could be "no class of people in the United States who so highly appreciate the legality of marriage as those persons who have been held and treated as property."¹⁴³ By flipping the standard proslavery argument to posit that these tragic events enabled slaves to desire the "legality of marriage" more than any "class of people," Bibb was tacitly implying that enslaved people might "appreciate...marriage" more than members of the planter class ever could. Bibb's argument suggests that slaves were all too aware of the legal ramifications of theories of racialized emotional differences.

In his autobiographies Frederick Douglass made a concerted effort to show that slaves or former slaves were not only acquainted with deeper sorrows, but that there were also singular joys that could only be experienced by enslaved people. In recalling his "battle with Mr. Covey," (which he described as "the turning-point in my career") he wrote about the way that he fought back with "triumph." Douglass declared that "He can only understand the deep satisfaction which I experienced, who has himself repelled by force the bloody arm of slavery."¹⁴⁴ Notably, in his second autobiography, Douglass employed different comparisons to describe how few could truly know what it was like to triumph over Covey. Though in *Narrative* he implied that one would have to be a slave, in *My Bondage And My Freedom* he noted that "He only can understand the effect of this combat on my spirit, who has himself ...hazarded something, in repelling the unjust and cruel aggressions of a tyrant."¹⁴⁵ So the experience could be understood not only by slaves and former slaves, but by anyone who had fought against an "unjust and

¹⁴³ Henry Bibb Edt Gilbert Osofsky Puttin' On Ole Massa 1969, 164

¹⁴⁴ Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (New York: Barnes and Noble Classics) 69

¹⁴⁵ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 180-181

cruel...tyrant." Perhaps with time Douglass sought a more universal comparison, or perhaps he changed his wording because labeling his former master a "tyrant" further emphasized the slaveholder's cruelty.

Douglass experienced a similar unparalleled joy when he began his first job in the North. Douglass noted that though "It was new, dirty and hard work," he "went at it with glad heart and a willing hand. I was now my own master. It was a happy moment, the rapture of which can be understood only by those who have been slaves." He continued that he "worked that day with a pleasure I had never before experienced."¹⁴⁶ His effusive remarks suggested a number of links between emotions and work for slaves. Though Douglass was commenting on how much "pleasure" he derived from work, he also insinuated that one could only be gladdened by work if the labor was performed voluntarily. In describing his joy at working as a free man, he seemed to deny the possibility of enslaved people obtaining even a modicum of satisfaction from labor, or pride in work. He also suggested that the height of joy was to be one's "own master," that true happiness was inextricably tied to mastery of the self (and perhaps unknowable to one who had never had a master).

Harriet Jacobs also spoke of the newfound emotions she experienced after escaping, in recounting how "anti-slavery" people in New York warmly welcomed her. Jacobs recalled:

"how careful they all were not to say anything that might wound my feelings. How gratifying this was, can be understood only by those who have been accustomed to be treated as if they were not included within

¹⁴⁶ Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, 98; Douglass used almost identical language in his second autobiography to describe the unique joy of being in control of his labor and wages, noting that "the rapturous excitement with which I seized the job, may not be easily understood, except by some one with an experience something like mine." Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 256-257

the pale of human beings.”¹⁴⁷ She implied that someone who had been a slave, someone who was familiar with being “treated as if they were not...human,” could particularly understand the feeling of finally being acknowledged as a being that possessed feelings. This suggests that the feeling most unique to slaves was not sorrow or joy, but being treated as though their feelings could not be “wound(ed).”

Closely tied to the recurring claim that enslaved feelings were unknowable, was the assertion that words were inadequate to convey the emotions of slaves. In his narrative Lunsford Lane began to describe how he felt upon learning that he had successfully purchased his own freedom before stopping, observing that “I cannot describe my feelings to those who have never been slaves; then why should I attempt it?”¹⁴⁸ Jacob Stroyer claimed that he was not the only one who would be unable to express the feelings of enslaved people, writing that “No one can describe the intense emotions in the negro’s soul on those occasions when they were trying to please their masters and mistresses.”¹⁴⁹ These emotional lacunas, places where a well of emotions was signified through a pointed lack of affective description, might be considered an example of what Charles Heglar refers to in *Rethinking the Slave Narrative* as “negative narration.” Heglar argues that many authors of slave narratives “present stories of what will *not* or cannot happen” to better explicate events, and “to illustrate a danger or a problem that the narrator is aware of and must explain because” the narrator knows that

¹⁴⁷ Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc.) 133

¹⁴⁸ Lunsford Lane in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968) 17

¹⁴⁹ Jacob Stroyer *My Life in the South* in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* 45

the readers' "expectations...will not be met."¹⁵⁰ The Antebellum reader, well-versed in the constructs of sentimental literature, would expect the emotional experiences of slavery to be portrayed in vivid and flowery detail, and would be acutely aware of its absence. By not meeting the readers' expectations, authors like Bibb were further emphasizing the point that their emotions were unimaginable by leaving them unarticulated. As with the trope of unknowable emotions, the construct of the emotional lacuna was intended to emphasize the exceptionality of enslaved feelings. By denying their readers full knowledge of their emotional lives as slaves, authors of slave narratives may also have been trying to prevent the mastery of enslaved emotions by non-slave readers.

Not surprisingly, the notion that words were insufficient to capture the experience of slavery was frequently employed in an effort to convey the feelings brought on by the divisions of families, in particular when one was being sold away from loved ones, or watching loved ones be sold. Upon learning that his wife and children were to be sold, Henry "Box" Brown wrote "I cannot express, in language, what were my feelings on this occasion."¹⁵¹ Similarly, when William Wells Brown set out on his "journey" in the slave coffle to New Orleans, he noted that "I am at a loss for language to express my feelings on that occasion."¹⁵² Kidnapped into slavery as an adult, Solomon Northup's own children were free, but he was also stunned into wordlessness upon witnessing families divided by sale. Watching children being sold away from their enslaved mother, Eliza, Northup wrote that seeing her reaction to the sale "recalls memories more mournful and

¹⁵⁰ Charles J. Heglar *Rethinking the Slave Narrative: Slave Marriage and the Narratives of Henry Bibb and William and Ellen Craft* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001) 24-25

¹⁵¹ Henry Box Brown *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown* written by himself, introduction by Richard Newman, Foreword by Henry Louis Gates, Jr (New York, (Oxford University Press, 2002) 48

¹⁵² William Wells Brown Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa*, 191

affecting than any language can portray.”¹⁵³ In describing how his mother was forced to watch as he was captured and returned to slavery, Henry Bibb claimed that “No tongue could express the deep anguish of my soul when I saw the silent tear drops streaming down the sable cheeks of an aged slave mother.”¹⁵⁴

The trope of emotional inexpressibility was also used to represent the intense emotions experienced by fugitive slaves while on the run. Though Henry Bibb wryly commented that he was skilled in “the art of running away,” the many attempts at escape that trained him in this “art” were no less harrowing or full of anguish and anxiety. When writing about how he and his family hid in the woods while on the run, and were beset by wolves Henry Bibb wrote that “I find myself entirely unable to describe what my own feelings were at that time.”¹⁵⁵ After escaping from his master one Saturday night, James Pennington experienced days of overwhelming hunger, fear and vulnerability before being taken in by a Quaker man he referred to as W.W. On the run for almost a week, Pennington would later write about the plethora of emotions washing over him as he waited, starving, for night to fall, claiming “I cannot now, with pen or tongue, give a correct idea of the feeling of wretchedness I experienced.” Sheltered by the family of W.W. for six months, he was hesitant to leave, for fear of “recapture,” and to avoid traveling in winter. Pennington described his eventual departure in an aside: “My dear reader, if I could describe to you the emotions I felt when I left the threshold of W.W.’s

¹⁵³ Solomon Northup, Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa*, 216; Similar language was also used by the author that Josiah Henson dictated his story to. When Henson learned that he was to be sent away from his family to New Orleans, almost certainly to die without ever seeing them again, the author wrote that Henson’s “expectation of my fate...produced the degree of misery nearest to that of despair; and it is in vain for me to attempt to describe the wretchedness I experienced as I made ready to go on board the flat boat.” Josiah Henson *The life of Josiah Henson: formerly a slave, now an inhabitant of Canada*, 1849, 38

¹⁵⁴ Henry Bibb Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa*, 106

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 66, 127,

door, you could not fail to see how deplorable is the condition of the fugitive slave.”¹⁵⁶

Unlike the claim that the emotions of enslaved people could never be known to non-slaves, here Pennington suggested that were his words adequate, his reader “could not fail” to understand “the condition of the fugitive slave.” But by bringing the reader back to the present moment, with the reference to how he “cannot now” describe his emotions, and through the aside to the reader, Pennington emphasized the enduring intensity of those emotions, highlighting how, even years later, those feelings could not be accurately captured in words.

Douglass employed the trope of inexpressibility more than any other author of a slave narrative, especially in his second autobiography. In *My Bondage and My Freedom* he described an absence through absence when he discussed how he never really knew his mother, and he could not write about his lack of a mother “without feelings to which I can give no adequate expression.”¹⁵⁷ He later employed this trope to represent the trauma of the physical abuse slaves endured without trying to capture in words brutality that he had “no heart to describe.”¹⁵⁸ Here Douglass highlights another reason for the omission of emotional description. By not detailing the violence he had witnessed he does what Saidiya Hartman advocates for in *Scenes of Subjection*, bringing “attention to the ease with which” violent “scenes are usually reiterated, the casualness with which they are circulated, and the consequences of this routine display of the slave’s ravaged body.”¹⁵⁹ He also shied away from unnecessarily chronicling the mental abuse of slavery,

¹⁵⁶ James W. C. Pennington *The Former Blacksmith* in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* 35, 44

¹⁵⁷ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom* ed. With an introduction and Notes by John David Smith, (New York: Penguin Books, 2003) 42

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 70-72

¹⁵⁹ Saidiya Hartman *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 3

explaining to his reader that he would "never be able to narrate the mental experience through which it was my lot to pass during my stay at Covey's."¹⁶⁰ This construct even seemed to trump the idea that enslaved emotions could only be known by slaves when Douglass wrote about the discovery of his plot to run away was discovered, observing that "Our sufferings, that morning, can be more easily imagined than described."¹⁶¹

Douglass returned to this figure of speech repeatedly in order to convey his emotions upon attaining freedom. In both *Narrative* and *My Bondage and My Freedom* Douglass wrote movingly about being at a loss for words whenever he was frequently "asked...how I felt" upon reaching a free state:

"It was a moment of joyous excitement, which no words can describe.... in a moment like that, sensations are too intense and too rapid for words. Anguish and grief, like darkness and rain, may be described, but joy and gladness, like the rainbow of promise, defy alike the pen and pencil."¹⁶²

This passage is especially notable when contrasted to the many times that Douglass that declared that painful events could *not* be described. While as a slave he endured "anguish and grief" too horrific to describe, as a free person it was his joy that was too great to capture in words. This passage highlights another trope, (one which I will explore in my final chapter) that of the emotional transformation that slaves underwent upon reaching freedom. In order to support that claim that any emotional differences were rooted in slave status, former slaves had to depict the metamorphosis their feelings underwent, even through inverting constructs used to talk about enslaved emotions.

¹⁶⁰ Douglass frequently used this construct to portray his mental state while enslaved. When 1836 dawned, and he was still enslaved, he recounted how the realization "rendered me gloomy and disconsolate. The anguish of my mind may not be written." Later, in describing how he felt the morning of his planned group departure to run for freedom "I cannot describe the tempest and tumult of my brain." Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 161, 199, 210

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 216

¹⁶² Ibid, 248

Interestingly, Fanny Kemble also asserted that the emotions of slaves could not be expressed, either because of the intensity of these feelings, or because their emotions were simply inexpressible. Kemble recorded a conversation she had with an enslaved woman named Molly when the woman's husband was about to be sold, ruefully observing that she could "not write you the poor woman's jargon, which was ludicrous; for I can not write you the sighs, and tears, and piteous looks, and gestures, that made it pathetic."¹⁶³ This passage is typical of Kemble, who, in the same breath, mocked Molly's manner of speech as "ludicrous," before indicating that she was genuinely moved by Molly's sorrow. Kemble emphasized the fact that her inability to capture what made the woman's narrative so "pathetic" was not because of the supposedly "ludicrous" dialect, but because there was something verbally inexpressible about what the woman was experiencing. Molly's story seemed to provoke Kemble with both the facts of her tale (her husband had been sold, she had lost six children and experienced two miscarriages) and her body language, her physical responses to her own emotional tale. The very factors that Kemble found most poignant, she could not replicate for her reader. Kemble was stymied once again after a conversation with several enslaved women about the sexual coercion they experienced at the hands of the plantation's overseer. The women's stories of rape and sexual harassment once again reminded Kemble of the inadequacy of words in such occasions: "I have written down the woman's words; I wish I could write down the voice and look of abject misery with which they spoke."¹⁶⁴ It was not only a matter of trying to accurately reproduce the women's non-verbal tones and facial

¹⁶³ Frances Anne Kemble *Journal of a Residence On a Georgian Plantation In 1838-1839*, 112

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 127

expressions in writing; Kemble suggested that even her own words were insufficient to capture the depth of their emotions.

In contrast to Kemble's belief that her own words could not communicate the intense emotions experienced by the slaves on her husband's plantations, Kemble seemed impressed with the ways that slaves articulated their own feelings:

“I am very much struck with the vein of melancholy, which assumes almost a poetical tone in some of the things they say. Did I tell you of that poor old decrepit creature Dorcas...as she took up my watch from the table and looked at it” she said “Ah! I need not look at this; I have almost done with time,”¹⁶⁵

Once again Kemble hinted that there was something innately and perpetually unhappy about slaves and the way they conveyed their emotions (she hinted at the biological basis of these emotions through the language of a “vein of melancholy) and that this inborn sorrow endowed slaves with the ability to speak with a “poetical tone.” It also seems that once Kemble decided that enslaved people were essentially tragic she perceived every word, look and gesture as in “the vein of melancholy.”

In the battle to frame emotional difference, and assert the emotional exceptionality of enslaved people, former slaves not only refuted claims that their feelings were limited or static, they responded by questioning the affective depth of slaveholders. Proslavery advocates like Pollard, Dew and James Henry Hammond may have depicted slavery as “benign,” and designed to “foster kindly feelings” between slaveholders and slaves, but authors of slave narratives repeatedly contradicted these claims by describing their former masters as “heartless” (or exhibiting “heartlessness”), “unfeeling” “tyrants... whose cold hearts cannot sympathize with your feelings.”¹⁶⁶ As a

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 143-144

¹⁶⁶ James Henry Hammond “Hammond's Letters on Slavery” *The Pro-Slavery Argument*, 128, 161; For examples of the language of slaveholders as “unfeeling,” “heartless” or their “heartlessness” see Henry Bibb Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa*, 138; Solomon Northup Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On*

free man, James Pennington wrote to his former master, a Col. F. T. of “Washington County, Maryland,” taking him to task for his lack of feelings, claiming that he had “in the most unfeeling manner, abused my father for no cause but speaking a word to you.”¹⁶⁷ Frederick Douglass elaborated on this claim that slaveholders lacked feeling, remarking that his former master, Capt. Anthony “could, when it suited him, appear to be literally insensible to the claims of humanity.”¹⁶⁸ Douglass’s statement implied that there was a dissembling aspect to Anthony’s heartlessness, that he could conveniently select when to inure himself to the feelings of his slaves, as it best “suited him.” It also suggested that the claims of members of the planter class that slaves were emotionally limited were nullified by the fact that they themselves were “insensible” to the feelings of others.

Though Henry Bibb’s writings about enslaved emotions suggested that he believed the emotions of slaves were not based in race, he argued that slaveholders’ capacity to feel might be intrinsic when he described his experience as a slave to a Native American man. According to Bibb this man “was the most reasonable, and humane slaveholder that I ever belonged to.” Bibb explained that American Indians did not have “slave laws,” like those he had known under other masters, “Neither do they separate husbands and wives, nor parents and children.” This led him to conclude that “All things considered, if I must

Ole Massa, 348, 367, 370; Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 165; James W. C. Pennington *The Former Blacksmith in Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium*, 7; Moses Grandy *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy, Late a Slave, in the United States of America*, in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium*, 40; Jacob Stroyer *My Life in the South in Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium*, 92; “Tyrants” quote from Henry Brown *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown written by himself*, introduction by Richard Newman, Foreword by Henry Louis Gates, Jr (New York, (Oxford University Press, 2002) 17

¹⁶⁷ James W. C. Pennington *The Former Blacksmith in Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* 79-80

¹⁶⁸ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 61

Planter and pro-slavery author Edward Pollard relied on similar language when he referred to the North as an “unfeeling land.” He sees the North as “unfeeling,” in an implied insulting contrast to the South. Edward A. Pollard *Black Diamonds Gathered in the Darkey Homes of the South*, 38

be a slave, I had by far, rather be a slave to an Indian, than to a white man, from the experience I have had with both."¹⁶⁹ Much like Timothy Flint, Bibb may have been envisioning a racialized spectrum of feeling, which established Native Americans as more sympathetic than whites, even if they were also slaveholders.

Solomon Northup questioned the emotional capacity of other members of the plantocracy as well, observing that "The requisite qualifications in an overseer are utter heartlessness, brutality and cruelty," which suggested that slaves perceived the lack of emotions displayed by overseers as a job requirement, rather than a biological imperative.¹⁷⁰ Jacob Stroyer referred to Mr. Black a white "slave hunter" charged with tracking down slaves in his South Carolina county as "one of the most heartless men I have ever seen."¹⁷¹ Plantation mistresses were also labeled unfeeling: Northup referred to his owner's wife, Mistress Epps, as "heartless," while Harriet Jacobs declared that "It had never occurred to Mrs. Flint that slaves could have any feelings."¹⁷² Although ostensibly a comment about slaves' incapacity to feel, Jacobs' statement functioned as evidence that Mrs. Flint was the one who was devoid of feeling. Set amidst a chapter about the tragic death of Jacobs' aunt after years of miscarriages brought on by toiling for Mrs. Flint night and day, a reader could be expected to interpret this supposition about Mrs. Flint as proof that if she believed slaves could not feel it was she who lacked heart and empathy. In a sentimental age, this would be a grave insult.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ Henry Bibb Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa* 1969, 141

¹⁷⁰ Solomon Northup Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa*, 367

¹⁷¹ Jacob Stroyer *My Life in the South in Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium*, 69

¹⁷² Solomon Northup Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa*, 348; Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 121

¹⁷³ For more on the importance members of the planter class (as well as middle class Northerners in the antebellum period) placed on maintaining emotional appearances, and with displaying their emotional acuity and authenticity see Steven M. Stowe *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) and Karen Halttunen *Confidence Men*

Jacob's observation reveals the ways that former slaves turned the arguments of proslavery authors against them by using the assertion that slaves had limited or animalistic feelings to argue that the masters who believed this were themselves emotionally stunted. In writing about the anguish of slave sales, Henry Brown opined that "the tyrant slaveholder regards not the social, or domestic feelings of the slave" and instead based the purchases "according to the *moneyed* values" of the slaves. Brown noted that slaveholders did not care about the "ties by which the individuals are bound to each other; indeed their common expression is, that 'niggers have no feelings.'"¹⁷⁴ In doing so, he highlighted the link between how slaveholders were oblivious to the emotions of slaves, and how they professed that enslaved people had "no feelings." Josiah Henson also described the "heart-rending scenes" of enslaved families being divided by sale to simultaneously argue that emotions did not differ by race, and that slaveholders lacked compassion. Henson narrated that the sales like these meant "husbands and wives, parents and children were to be separated forever. Affections, which are as strong in the African as in the European were to be cruelly disregarded."¹⁷⁵ On the face of it, Henson's observation was a claim that people of African descent did not feel differently from those of European descent, but he was also implicitly denigrating those who would "disregard" the familial "affections" of enslaved people.

Because authors of slave narratives typically described slaveholders in these terms, it was notable when any author of a slave narrative complimented a member of the slaveocracy on their emotional capacity. Harriet Jacobs exhibited this when discussing a

and *Painted Women: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830 - 1870*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982). I will discuss how planters learn the "emotional regime" of slavery in another chapter.

¹⁷⁴ Henry Brown *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown*, 29

¹⁷⁵ Josiah Henson *The life of Josiah Henson: formerly a slave, now an inhabitant of Canada*, 1849, 27

slave trader she overheard while hiding in her grandmother's attic. The trader declared "trading in niggers is a bad business for a fellow that's got any heart." Jacobs conceded that though she hated slave traders and believed them to be "the vilest wretches on earth," that this trader "seemed to have some feeling."¹⁷⁶ Similarly, Sella Martin commended a slave trader for castigating Martin's owner when he tried to divide Martin's mother and father. Martin acknowledged that this action revealed the trader to possess a "feeling to which, as a general rule, his class are strangers." Martin credited the man with showing his family a great deal of "kindness," but was still quite clear that the trader's behavior (and sentiments) were anomalous.¹⁷⁷ Jacob Stroyer pointed out another exception, declaring slave traders to be "hard-hearted white men," but noting that when the slaves they were about to send off "cried out with one voice as though the heaven and earth were coming together...it was so pitiful" that the drivers "shed tears like children."¹⁷⁸ In all of these cases, the rare moment of sympathy or feeling was described not as a defense of slave traders, but to delineate the extent to which they were generally and universally emotionally lacking.

It is less surprising that Solomon Northup extolled the emotional abilities of the man who helped him escape slavery. Northup was able to return to his family in the North only after a white visitor to the Epps' plantation named Bass helped him deliver a letter to Northup's friends in the North. It is little wonder then that Northup described him as a man "whose true heart overflowed with noble and generous emotions."¹⁷⁹ Of course, praising Bass for his "noble and generous emotions" was a sharp contrast to

¹⁷⁶ Harriet Jacobs "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl" (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc.) 90

¹⁷⁷ Sella Martin in John W. Blassingame *Slave Testimony*, 704

¹⁷⁸ Jacob Stroyer *My Life in the South* in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium*, 41

¹⁷⁹ Solomon Northup Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1969) 372

Northup's earlier comments about the members of the planter class who he had deemed "heartless."

By highlighting the very few "feeling" members of the planter class, authors of slave narratives emphasized the fact that supporters of slavery as a category were typically emotionally lacking. But in claiming that members of the planter class were "unfeeling," emotionally limited, or incapable of the same depth of emotions as slaves, former slaves were invoking the rhetoric of proslavery advocates rather than challenging it. By responding in this manner, antislavery authors were allowing the champions of slavery to set the terms of the debate. Claims that enslaved people were emotionally exceptional, and that their emotions were often impossible to put into words also perpetuated the proslavery notion that people of color were emotionally inscrutable. Of course, this might also have been a deliberate strategy on the part of former slaves to heighten the belief [which I will explore in another chapter] that the sentiments of slaves were illegible, and thus potentially all the more dangerous. Frederick Law Olmsted suggested as much after his 1857 visit to the South, noting dryly "the tranquility of the South is the tranquility of Hungary and of Poland," countries that had been rocked by revolution less than a decade before.¹⁸⁰ Emotional illegibility could conceal intentions, and help to keep members of the planter class in a state of fear. Thus claims about enslaved emotions were inextricably tied to the emotional landscape and politics of the South.

The writings of former slaves about the emotional exceptionality of enslaved people may have paralleled proslavery claims that people of African descent felt

¹⁸⁰ Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveller's Observations on Cotton and Slavery In the American Slave States, 1853 – 1861* Da Capo Press, New York: 1996, p. 573

intrinsically differently, but the claim that emotions were determined by one's status as free or enslaved was one that most slaveholders were not ready to hear in the Antebellum period. The idea that emotions were linked to free status functioned to counter proslavery propaganda that depicted slaves as happier, or emotionally limited, but it also challenged the views of individual slaveholders, who might be forced to reconsider how their slaves felt about them.¹⁸¹ These texts also suggested that if emotions were based on slave status rather than race, then once free, people of color would expect the same emotional liberty and inalienable right to the "pursuit of happiness" as other free citizens. The contestations over whether or not emotional norms and strictures were structured by race or free status would only grow more heated in the wake of universal Emancipation. For their part, many former planters, proslavery advocates and white supremacists would continue to argue that people of color were fundamentally emotionally different, and that this was grounds upon which to deny people of color full rights as citizens.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Drew Gilpin Faust illustrates the emotional crisis James Henry Hammond experienced when, "With the exigencies of Civil War and the imminence of emancipation," slaves fled his plantation in droves. According to Faust, Hammond was "forced to recognize that what he had regarded as devotion from his slaves had been largely a form of manipulation." The mass exodus of his slaves made Hammond confront not only how his slaves had felt about him, but how he had felt about his slaves. It also highlighted his inability to emotionally master himself or his slaves. Drew Gilpin Faust *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1982) 104

¹⁸² This rhetoric was not only used to disenfranchise people of African descent. In a 19th century society which had come to accept the claims of Cartesian dualism that reason was superior to the emotions, entire groups of people could be denied rights simply by being labeled overly emotional, and thus unfit for citizenship. This claim would also be used to deny women the right to vote.

Chapter Two: “To Change Their Sentiments”: The Emotions the Slaves Made

In his epistolary pro-slavery book, *Black Diamonds*, Edward Pollard interlaced the personal and the polemical to defend the institution of slavery. Pollard described traveling the world as a young man, and wrote effusively about the first time he encountered a slave on a train after returning South. Pollard did not know the slave, but he recalled that the enslaved man “looked like *home*.... I looked at him with my face aglow, and my eyelids touched with tears. How he reminded me of my home – of days gone by ... ‘when I was a boy,’!”¹⁸³ For Pollard, the mere sight of an enslaved person, even one that he was not acquainted with, summoned up feelings of joy, nostalgia, even sorrow. From reading Pollard’s work, it is clear that slaves were crucial in constructing Pollard’s emotional life, shaping his concepts of joy and affection and forming the backbone of how he remembered and understood his own past and identity. No doubt trying to prove that slavery was rooted in paternalistic and mutual affection, Pollard also revealed that slaves were so important to his affective sense of self that seeing an enslaved adult male reminded emotionally transported him to his own childhood. This scene of a slave triggering a flood of memories for the planter highlights the extent to which the emotions of slaveholders were created by and through enslaved people.

Many historians of emotions as well as psychologists have argued that emotions are not just individually felt, but collectively constructed and historically contingent.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ Edward A. Pollard *Black Diamonds Gathered in the Darkey Homes of the South* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968) 22

¹⁸⁴ See for example William M. Reddy *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Peter N. Stearns with Carol Z. Stearns, “Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards”, *The American Historical Review*, 90:4, (Oct., 1985), 813-836; Daniel Bar-Tal “Why Does Fear Override Hope in Societies Engulfed by Intractable Conflict, as It Does in the Israeli Society?” *Political Psychology*, 22-3, 2001 601-627

Some historians focus on how collective emotions and affective norms in the nineteenth century were shaped by sentimental culture.¹⁸⁵ Yet all too often historians of emotion, in particular those who attribute collective emotions to cultural influences, focus solely on how affective norms were shaped by elites, without attention to the ways that subalterns and subcultures contribute to or construct those feelings and emotional practices.¹⁸⁶ This has also been true of historians working on the affective practices of slaveholders. In his work on the rituals of slaveholders Steven Stowe claims that his goal is to flesh out “a shared intellectual and emotional terrain” of the planter class. Yet Stowe does not see enslaved people as part of this “emotional terrain.” Instead, he explains that he was “struck with how seldom” slaveholder “make mention of black people, even familiar, personal servants.” This leads him to conclude that rather than allowing proximity to breed “intimacy” there was “an essential cultural division between the races” which meant that enslaved people in no way contributed to the emotional rituals and norms of slaveholders.¹⁸⁷ I would argue that the emotions, and affective practices of the Antebellum South were fundamentally conditioned upon and constructed by enslaved people.

The writings of former slaves reveal that enslaved people were intensely aware of their effect on their masters’ emotions. In her 1868 narrative, Elizabeth Keckley detailed the abuses she faced as a slave, as well as her experience working as a seamstress for

¹⁸⁵ See for example Ezra Tawil *The Making of Racial Sentiment: Slavery and the Birth of the Frontier Romance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Karen Halttunen *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830 - 1870*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982)

¹⁸⁶ This is my main critique of William Reddy’s *The Navigation of Feeling*, who believes that emotional norms, the sets and practices of which he terms “emotional regimes,” are created and enforced by those in power. I seek to challenge this top-down model of how emotional norms, practices and accepted affective expressions are established and policed.

¹⁸⁷ Steven M. Stowe *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) xvi-xvii

Mary Todd Lincoln and Jefferson Davis's wife after purchasing her own freedom. When Keckley was a teenager her master's wife was a woman whom Keckley described as being of "humble" origins. Because of this, Keckley believed the woman to be "morbidly sensitive," convinced that Keckley "regarded her with contemptuous feelings because she was of poor parentage." Keckley does not say if she possessed "contemptuous feelings" for her mistress, but it did not matter, Keckley claimed she "did the work of three servants, and yet I was scolded and regarded with distrust."¹⁸⁸ Whether Keckley had contempt for her mistress or not she had not only made her mistress feel shame, she had insured that she would also feel the ramifications of her emotional influence, as a slave who was now viewed as untrustworthy.

Some slaves were even more deliberate in their attempts to influence how their masters felt. Henry Bibb observed that there was "much superstition among the slaves," and that it was commonly believed that one could chew on a "bitter root...and spit towards their masters when they are angry with their slaves," the implication being that the master would no longer be "angry," at least not at the spitting slave. Having already developed an admitted predilection for running away, Bibb anticipated "being flogged" by his master, a fate he longed to avoid. Bibb recalled that a friend told him to seek out a "conjurer" who could sell him a charm to stave off beatings. The conjurer sold him a powder, and instructed Bibb that if his owner threatened to whip him he should "sprinkle it about my master" and that "would prevent him." This potion worked so well that Bibb returned for more over time, eventually taking to scattering the enchanted "dust" in his masters' bedroom so they had more exposure to it. According to Bibb, he intended it to

¹⁸⁸ Elizabeth Keckley *Behind the Scenes in the Lincoln White House: Memoirs of an African-American Seamstress* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2006) 11

function as a “love powder, to change their sentiments of anger, to those of love, towards me.” Eventually he noted that his conjuring campaign ended after the powder reduced his masters to coughing and sneezing. “Trembling with fear” that they might discover his “dangerous experiments upon them,” and perhaps believe he was trying to poison them, which would surely lead to an even more severe flogging, he gave up his attempts to bewitch his owners.

What even Bibb seemed to dismiss as an anecdote about slave superstitions reveals a great deal about how enslaved people viewed the emotional terrain of slavery. Bibb spoke of how he had, at the time, a “great faith in conjuration and witchcraft,” but the greatest motivators in his tale seemed to be fear of his masters’ anger, and desire to control his masters’ emotions.¹⁸⁹ Even if only briefly, Bibb believed that he had “change(d) their sentiments” through the aid of conjuring, and transforming their anger into affection to avoid punishment. Of course, this fleeting moment of affective victory was swiftly replaced by fear of a worse punishment than the one he originally hoped to avoid. This hints at how much slaves were willing to risk to influence their master’s emotions, and how much power their master’s feelings had over their fates.

One important way that enslaved people constructed their master’s emotions was by forging the affective relations that knit slaveholding families together. An article from DeBow’s sheds light on how enslaved people were seen to form the bonds that linked generations of slaveholders. Dr. McTyeire claimed that an elderly slave was an “heirloom” to be “cherished” with “tenderness” because said slave may have “laid the foundations of the families’ wealth...bore your father in his arms, and went afield with

¹⁸⁹ Henry Bibb in *Puttin’ On Ole Massa: The Slave Narratives of Henry Bibb, William Wells Brown, and Solomon Northup* Gilbert Osofsky, ed (New York: Harper & Row, 1969) 70-71

your grandfather when he was starting in life.”¹⁹⁰ The implication was that slaves not only produced wealth, they generated family memories and could even embody a connection to loved ones who may have passed. James Henry Hammond used very similar language in his defense of slavery, arguing that though slavery was “founded on force” the institution was nevertheless able “to cultivate the tenderest and purest sentiments of the human heart.” He described a thoroughly romanticized and entirely reciprocal affective relationship between master and slave, of slaves “who served his father, and rocked his cradle,” shared in their master’s “griefs” as well as the celebration of holidays, and “whose hearty and affectionate greetings never fail to welcome” their master “home.”¹⁹¹ Like Dr. McTyeire, Hammond seemed to conflate feelings about slaves with those about one’s own family, revealing the extent to which slaves shaped his feelings about home and family.

According to McTyeire and Hammond the seeds of the intergenerational relationships between master and slave were planted in childhood friendships. In his pro-slavery essays Daniel Hundley described and thoroughly romanticized the development of a childhood friend into a life-long, loyal slave. He wrote fondly about the supposed childhood bonds of slaves and “young gentlemen,” and how they would play side by side, the slave “shadow(ing)” their master. As they grew older, the slave followed the slaveholder to school, and instead of playing “both master and slave” threw themselves “enthusiastically” into hunting.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ D. B. De Bow [The Editor], H. N. McTyeire “Plantation Life—Duties and Responsibilities,” *DeBow’s Review* 29-3 (September 1860) 363

¹⁹¹ James Henry Hammond “Hammond’s Letters on Slavery,” *The Pro-Slavery Argument* (1852) 161

¹⁹² Supposedly anti-slavery author Fanny Kemble also romanticized the long-term effect of childhood intimacy between free and enslaved children. Kemble theorized that as masters and slaves were increasingly linked through ownership for “successive generations” that over time “the relations of owner and slave” would “lose some of its harsher features.” Frances Anne Kemble *Journal of a Residence On a*

While some proslavery writers believed, like Hammond, that childhood relationships with slaves helped master and slave alike “cultivate the tenderest and purest sentiments,” other eighteenth and nineteenth-century writers and critics of slavery worried that early exposure to the hierarchies of slavery was deleterious to children of the planter class. Some authors argued that the power dynamics of slavery did irreparable damage to the character and emotional capacity of slaveholding children. In *Notes on the State of Virginia* Thomas Jefferson expressed his concern that constant exposure to the “tyranny” of slavery insured that children of the planter class were “stamped by it with odious peculiarities.”¹⁹³ Writing over seventy years later Frederick Olmsted was more explicit about how being raised amidst slavery irrevocably altered the disposition and temperaments of people of the slaveholding class. He observed that:

“The man who has been accustomed from childhood to see men beaten when they have no chance to defend themselves; to hear men accused, who dare not open their lips in...reply; the man who is accustomed to see other men whip women without interference, remonstrance, or any expression of indignation, must have a certain quality, which is an essential part of personal honour with us, greatly blunted, if not entirely destroyed.”¹⁹⁴

In some ways Olmsted was really pointing out what he found unjust about slavery, specifically that people could be whipped without being able to “defend themselves” physically or verbally, and that women would be beaten at all “without... any expression

Georgian Plantation In 1838-1839 p. 90; Daniel R. Hundley *Social Relations in Our Southern States* ed. With an Introduction by William J. Cooper, Jr. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979) 32-34

¹⁹³ Thomas Jefferson from “Notes on the State of Virginia” quoted by Thomas Roderick Dew in “Professor Dew on Slavery” in *The Pro-Slavery Argument* (Charleston: Walker, Richards and Co. 1852) 454-455

¹⁹⁴ Olmsted’s suggestion that slavery somehow spoiled the character of slaveholding youth may have been part of a larger anti-slavery trend to argue that slavery was as negative for members of the planter class as it was for slaves. Linda Brent made clear that not only slaveholding sons, but the daughters of the South were also threatened by the perversion of slavery, noting “The slaveholder’s sons are, of course, vitiated, even while boys, by the unclean influences everywhere around them. Nor do the master’s daughters always escape.” Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 46; Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveller’s Observations on Cotton and Slavery In the American Slave States, 1853 – 1861* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996) 572 – 573;

of indignation.” Olmsted suggested that because the system was characterized by such ignominious actions, a member of the planter class raised in this environment could not help but become “accustomed” to it, thus “blunt(ing)” their very ability to possess “personal honour” or to “express” certain emotions.¹⁹⁵ Although the quote refers to the ways that slavery shaped the character and feelings of members of the planter class, it also hinted at what enslaved people witnessed, endured, and became “accustomed” to “from childhood,” which I address in the following chapter.

Some proslavery authors vehemently argued that the social conditions of slavery helped slaveholding children develop affective control and an even temperament. Thomas Roderick Dew challenged Jefferson’s claim that the “tyranny” of slavery marred children of the planter class, arguing instead that “there is nothing which so much humanizes and softens the heart, as...*authority*.”¹⁹⁶ Similarly, Daniel Hundley defended the “use of authority” as a youth as an important source of character, and a way of learning self-control. He asserted that “The natural dignity of ... the Southern Gentleman” stems from “his habitual use of authority from his earliest years” and the ensuing “sense of the responsibility and it's incident obligations” which taught young men of the planter class “first to control themselves.”¹⁹⁷ This highlighted the importance

¹⁹⁵ Solomon Northup was also explicit about the affective impact of being raised a slaveholder. He claimed that his master’s son “possessed some noble qualities,” but raised with the belief that he was inherently superior to enslaved people, and that slaves were beyond “the pale of humanity,” it was little “wonder” to that slaveholders were “pitiless.” Similarly, Solomon opined that “Taught from earliest childhood” to abuse slaves, then as an adult “the sufferings and miseries of the slaves will be looked upon with indifference.” In this way Northup believed that slavery “necessarily fosters an unfeeling and cruel spirit” in members of the planter class. So slavery not only “blunted” one’s sense of “honour,” it apparently robbed one of the ability to feel pity, and left one “indifferen(t)” and “unfeeling.” Solomon Northup from from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin’ On Ole Massa* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1969) 338, 370-371

¹⁹⁶ Thomas Roderick Dew in “Professor Dew on Slavery” in *The Pro-Slavery Argument* (Charleston: Walker, Richards and Co. 1852) 456

¹⁹⁷ Since Hundley believed that learning to “use...*authority*” was a crucial component of development for young slaveholders, it is little wonder that throughout his work on the social classes that characterized the South, he romanticized the notion of life-long relationships between slaveholders and slaves. Hundley

of self-mastery to becoming a slaveholder, and the role *being* a slaveholder played in learning to “control” the self through “authority” over others.

Slaveholding parents meanwhile generally encouraged friendships between their slaveholding children and slaves, while others encouraged their children to be authority figures, not friends. Slaveholder Edward Pollard nostalgically recounted how he “was trained in an affectionate respect for the old slaves on the plantation; I was permitted to visit their cabins, and to carry them kind words and presents.”¹⁹⁸ He did not say who had “trained” him, but as a child only his parents would have been in the position of granting him permission to visit slaves, and of encouraging him to manifest his “affectionate respect” in “kind words” and gifts. If slaveholding children were taught to bear “respect” towards “old slaves,” slaveholding parents seemed equally concerned with fostering affective ties between slaveholding and enslaved children. The Auld parents showed their clear investment in establishing an emotional bond between their son Thomas, and young Frederick Douglass, who was charged with caring for him. Douglass was presented as a gift to Thomas, who “was affectionately told by his mother, that ‘*there was his Freddy,*’ and that ‘Freddy would take care of him;’” while Douglass “was told to ‘be kind to little Tommy’.”¹⁹⁹ Thomas may have become attached to Douglass out of love for his “present,” or because he now had another child to play with, but Douglass’s narrative emphasized that their introduction and their first feelings about one another were

suggested that one was not a true gentleman if one had not spent his childhood with a young slave as a “constant attendant,” accompanying him in play “like his shadow.” Hundley saw a natural evolution from the relationship forged in childhood “constant” enslaved “attendant” to that of a loyal adult slave. Daniel R. Hundley *Social Relations in Our Southern States* ed. With an Introduction by William J. Cooper, Jr. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979) 32-34, 70-71. For more on the romanticization of the long-term effect of childhood intimacy between free and enslaved children see Frances Anne Kemble *Journal of a Residence On a Georgian Plantation In 1838-1839* p. 90, Thomas Roderick Dew in “Professor Dew on Slavery” in *The Pro-Slavery Argument*, 457

¹⁹⁸ Edward A. Pollard *Black Diamonds*, 48-49

¹⁹⁹ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 103

mediated by Lucretia Auld. She subtly established the basis of their affective relationship by speaking of Douglass “affectionately,” and even through paralleling their nicknames. More overtly, she ordered Douglass to be “kind to little Tommy,” letting them both know that Douglass was expected to “care” for the young boy. By introducing Tommy to “his Freddy” Auld was also establishing for her son that the job of human chattel was to provide affection, but while Douglass was warned to be “kind” to his new master, Tommy was not issued a similar injunction. Nevertheless, with their initial feelings towards one another so heavily orchestrated, it could be expected that the boys would become attached.

Edward Pollard wrote enthusiastically about playing with his “sable companions” as a child, but a description of his time spent in solitude revealed even more about he felt about his enslaved associates. Pollard claimed that occasionally, “In the midst of my own boyish enjoyments,” while “having a pleasant ride...or feasting on delicacies,” his pleasure would be interrupted when it occurred to him that his “poor little slave companions” were at “work in the fields,” and “how they were made to tote burdens under the summer’s sun.” He also thought about “what poor food they had, and with what raptures they would devour ‘the cake’ with which I was pampering myself.” Overcome by these thoughts, young Pollard “would... become gloomy, embittered, and strangely anxious to inflict pain and privation on myself.”²⁰⁰ Perhaps when a young Pollard contrasted his comfortable existence with that of his “slave companions” he was overcome by guilt. Or perhaps Pollard described how “gloomy” and “embittered” he had felt as a child because he was writing in the sentimental mode, which romanticized

²⁰⁰ Edward A. Pollard *Black Diamonds*, 41

sorrowful feelings in particular.²⁰¹ But it is also possible that as a child, Pollard used these meditations on difference, and the emotions they provoked, in an attempt to simulate what he thought his “poor little slave companions” felt. According to child studies scholar Judy Dunn, children “very frequently ‘play’ with pretend feelings states,” engaging in games that require them “to ‘take on’ a feeling state other than their own.”²⁰² By spending his leisure time imagining how it would feel to eat “poor food” instead of “cake,” and then consciously contemplating feeling “pain and privation” Pollard was not only able to mull over how it might feel to be a slave child, he was able to try those emotions on for size.

Harriet Jacobs suggested that slaveholding parents were sometimes anxious about the amount of influence slaves had over the feelings of children of the planter class. Jacobs recalled how she “loved” her child mistress, who “returned my affection.” One day Jacobs heard Dr. Flint refer to his daughter’s “attachment” to Jacobs, who was astonished to hear his wife “promptly” respond that the “attachment ... proceeded from fear.” Jacobs recalled that hearing this upset her, as it made her wonder, “Did the child feign what she did not feel? Or was her mother jealous of the mite of love she bestowed on me?” Jacobs eventually decided this was rooted in envy, assuring herself that “Surely, little children are true.”²⁰³ Though Dr. Flint thought his daughter was devoted to Jacobs, his wife argued that this affection was false, and coerced. But Jacobs denied that their relationship was based in fear, before consoling herself that her mistress’s feelings for her could not be “feign(ed),” because “little children” were not capable of such guile.

²⁰¹ Anya Jabour “Albums of Affection: Female Friendship and Coming of Age in Antebellum Virginia” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* Vol. 107, No. 2, Spring 1999 125 – 158, 137

²⁰² Judy Dunn “Understanding Feelings: The Early Stages” from *Making Sense: The Child’s Construction of the World* ed by Jerome Bruner and Helen Haste (New York: Methuen, 1987)32

²⁰³ Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 20

Of course, there was more going on in this debate about how Miss Flint felt about Jacobs than a mother's envy over a possible friendship. This conversation reflected much larger emotional politics going on around the Flints, their daughter, and Jacobs, and set the stage for the relationship between Jacobs and Mrs. Flint. Since Dr. Flint was already sexually harassing Jacobs, it makes sense that he would encourage his daughter's attachment, thereby insuring Jacobs' continued presence in the Flint household. The envy that Jacobs perceived in Mrs. Flint's comment might have had as much to do with her worries about her daughter's affections as they did with her growing anxieties about her husband's attraction to Jacobs.

Children of the planter class also developed relationships with adult slaves, sometimes because of tensions within planter families. Sometimes this was based on a calculation that they might receive more emotional and physical support from slaves than from their own slaveholding family members. Edward Pollard revealed the complex affective relations of his childhood when he described his "poor 'mammy'" who "would protect me and humor me" when he was "chided...by my mother."²⁰⁴ Though his mother may have held authority over Pollard (and the enslaved woman), during emotional battles Pollard knew the enslaved woman would give him the "protection" and comfort he desired when his mother sought to discipline or scold him. Nor was Pollard the only member of the planter class who identified potential allies among the enslaved. Josiah Henson explained that his master, "Mr. R," was the legal guardian of his own young brother-in-law, his wife's brother Francis. Unfortunately for the orphaned Francis, Mr. R was an abusive alcoholic who did not give him enough food. Henson recalled how

²⁰⁴ Edward A. Pollard *Black Diamonds Gathered in the Darkey Homes of the South* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968) 30, 38-39

Francis “would often come to me, with tears in his eyes, to tell me he could not get enough to eat.” Henson explained that he made the boy his “friend for life, by sympathizing in his emotions” and “sharing with him the food I took care to provide for my own family.”²⁰⁵ When the boy needed it most Henson provided him with emotional and physical sustenance, nurturing him in ways that his own family would not. Pollard and Francis may have found true comfort and care in the homes of slaves. Of course, they may also have suspected that slaves would be hard-pressed to turn down a request of food or sympathy from a member of their master’s family. In this way, children like Pollard and Francis would have witnessed over time the role power could play in eliciting a desired affective response from an enslaved person.

Of course, slaveholding parents also expected these friendships between slaves and slaveholders to end with the onset of adulthood. Frederick Douglass recalled how when he returned to Baltimore and was reunited with his former friend “Little Tommy,” it was clear that “The loving relations” they had shared were no more. Douglass attributed this change to the fact that Tommy now “felt himself a *man*” and therefore “was no longer dependent on me for protection. As a “man” Tommy now demanded “more suitable associates...the time had come when his *friend* must become his *slave*...we must now take different roads.”²⁰⁶ Other authors would suggest that members

²⁰⁵ Fortunately for Henson, this kindness was repaid years later when Henson sought to buy his freedom. Fearing that he would be denied by his owner, he risked riding out without a pass to go see Francis, (“Master Frank”), to whom Henson “immediately told...all my plans and hopes” for freedom. Francis responded with a “sympathy which penetrates the heart of a slave, so little accustomed...to the exhibition of any such feeling on the part of a white man.” So his kindness to Frank as a child paid off, as he was indeed a “friend for life” as he agreed to help Henson to freedom. Of course, far too often childhood attachments did *not* lead to greater empathy on the part of members of the planter class. Henson seemed to suggest that his fortunate case was anomalous when he pointed out that slaves were not “accustomed” to such responses from slaveholders. Josiah Henson *The life of Josiah Henson: formerly a slave, now an inhabitant of Canada*, 1849, 20, 32.

²⁰⁶ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 224

of the planter class didn't just outgrow their enslaved companions and seek out "more suitable associates," they were told what kinds of emotional expressions and relationships were appropriate to have with slaves. In order to urge their children down the "road" to proper slaveholding, parents' directions to their children about changing their affective relations with slaves were often quite explicit. Lunsford Lane recalled how his master's children, who were his former playmates, "began to order me about," because they "were told to do so by my master and mistress."²⁰⁷

The process of transforming the relationship with one's childhood companions seems to have been harrowing for some young members of the planter class. Raised in Virginia, slaveholder John M. Nelson detailed his development "from painful childhood sympathy to manly callousness." He recalled how as a youth "he would try to stop the beating of slave children," and when they were whipped he would "mingle my cries with their, and feel almost willing to take a part of the punishment." His father chastised him repeatedly "for this kind of compassion," so over time Nelson "became so blunted that I could not only witness their stripes with composure, but *myself* inflict them, and that without remorse."²⁰⁸ Nelson's father made it clear to him that one was not supposed to feel "compassion" for slaves, and may have even ordered him to "witness" or "inflict" punishments to help him conquer these inappropriate feelings. Over time Nelson learned to check his tears, and to instead feel no "remorse" at watching or administering beatings. It is perhaps telling that Nelson did not describe his feelings towards slaves as having been altered, but rather "blunted" by deliberate repression. Slaveholding children not

²⁰⁷ Lunsford Lane in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium*, 7

²⁰⁸ Nell Irvin Painter *Soul Murder and Slavery*, The Fifteenth Charles Edmondson Historical Lectures, Baylor University, April 5-6, 1993 (Waco, TX: Markham Press Fund, Baylor University Press, 1995) 26; See also Edward A. Pollard *Black Diamonds*, 42, where he talks about how his feelings about slaves changed over time.

only had to end friendships with slaves and suppress any sympathy they had for their former companions, they had to transfer their compassion into feelings of mastery.

Over time, as their friendships with enslaved children were expected to subside, slaveholding children learned how adults of the planter class felt about slaves from watching their parents. Because of this, many pro-slavery authors stressed the importance of modeling healthy affective relations with slaves, for as Daniel Hundley cautioned his reader, "Children learn a great deal more from example than precept."²⁰⁹ Thomas Jefferson advised that children learn how to affectively relate to slaves from observing their parents interact with enslaved people. According to Jefferson, when slaveholders abused their authority by not reigning in their "passions" in the presence of slaves "children see this and learn to imitate it; for man is an imitative animal... From his cradle to his grave he is learning to do what he sees others do." Because of this, Jefferson recommended that a parent should "restrain" their "passion towards his slave," at least whenever "his child is present." All too often, however, parents did not guard their tempers when their children were watching. Instead, "The parent storms, the child looks on" and "catches the lineaments of his wrath," only to later re-enact this "wrath" on their own on "smaller slaves."²¹⁰ Here Jefferson suggested, as later authors also would, that if children learned how to behave and feel from watching their parents then parents should control their feelings about and towards their slaves. If they did not, Jefferson warned that children of the planter class would swiftly learn these affective lessons and treat the

²⁰⁹ Daniel R. Hundley *Social Relations in Our Southern States* ed w an intro by William J. Cooper, Jr. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979) 161

²¹⁰ Thomas Jefferson from "Notes on the State of Virginia" quoted by Thomas Roderick Dew in "Professor Dew on Slavery" in *The Pro-Slavery Argument*, 454-455

“smaller slaves” on the plantation with the same “passion” that they had seen their parents display towards adult slaves.

Throughout his narrative Solomon Northup discussed how watching parents interact with slaves shaped children’s views of the affective relationships between slaveholders and slaves. Northup’s owner, a man named Epps, maintained a campaign of sexual violence, harassment and physical abuse towards an enslaved woman named Patsey, a fact that was well known on the plantation. One day Epps demanded that Northup whip Patsey, while his wife stood nearby with their “children, gazing on the scene with an air of heartless satisfaction.” As the Epps family and other slaves looked on, knowing full-well that Patsey was being punished for Epps’ infidelity and Mistress’s Epp’s jealousy, Northup “struck her as many as thirty times” at his master’s behest.²¹¹ The Epps children may not have known the full extent of their father’s relationship with Patsey, but they may have seen that their mother was “satisf(ied)” rather than displeased at the display of violence. Though this was one of many scenes of violence that the Epps children witnessed, Northup emphasized that these events had an impact: “The effect of these exhibitions of brutality on the household of the slave-holder is apparent.” As he watched the “Epps’ oldest son” grow up, he watched as the boy on the brink of puberty took pleasure in “chastising” the family slaves, in particular, “the venerable Uncle Abram.” If the boy’s “childish judgment” deemed the man guilty of some offence then just as his father did to Patsey, Epps’ son would “sentence him to a certain number of lashes,” which he would himself “inflict with much gravity and deliberation.” The tangled knot of family, love and violence was even clearer when he would accompany his father into the fields:

²¹¹ Solomon Northup from from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin’ On Ole Massa*, 367-368

“Mounted on his pony, he often rides into the field with his whip, playing the overseer, greatly to his father’s delight. Without discrimination, at such times, he applies the rawhide, urging the slaves forward with shouts, and occasional expressions of profanity, while the old man laughs, and commends him as a thorough-going boy.”²¹²

As a boy growing into adulthood, Epps’ son was already exploiting the authority that he possessed over an elderly and esteemed man as a young boy of the planter class. He may have been imitating his father’s method of punishment when he whipped Uncle Abram on his own, but when he joined his father the dynamic grew more complex. If he had not already begun to associate pleasure with enslaved pain from watching his mother and father, he would no doubt do so now as he repeatedly won approval and compliments from his proud, amused father for whipping and verbally abusing slaves.

As young men of the planter class grew into adulthood, they no longer merely watched as slaves were disciplined, slaves’ bodies became a vector for father-sign bonding. Slaves were acutely aware that they bore the brunt of the process of indoctrination as young people of the planter class learned how to be slaveholders, and yearned to make their fathers proud. As a young man William Wells Brown was hired out to Major Freeland whose favorite method of disciplining his slaves was to “tie” them “up in the smokehouse, and whip them; after which, he would cause a fire to be made of tobacco stems,” so that the beaten slave was now “smoked.” According to Brown, Freeland referred to this ritual as “*Virginia play*.” Brown experienced this “play” first hand after he “ran away” from the Freelands. When he was found, his master “flogged me to his satisfaction,” then “he sent out his son Robert, a young man eighteen or twenty years of age, to see that I was well smoked... This, Robert told me, was the way his father used to do his slaves in Virginia.” Clearly Freeland had told his son that this was the best

²¹² *ibid*, 370

way to discipline slaves, or bragged to him about the perverse pleasure and “satisfaction” he derived from whipping his slaves and subjecting them to smoke inhalation. It is unclear why Major Freeland made his son perform “Virginia play,” rather than doing so himself. It is also unclear how Robert felt as he forced Brown to inhale the noxious fumes. Perhaps he too felt fear, or perhaps he felt proud to be entrusted with this father’s beloved activity, which he had grown up hearing about. Regardless of how he felt at the time, Brown believed that the son was a quick study, as Brown proclaimed, “Robert Freeland was a ‘chip off the old block.’”²¹³

Learning how to physically and emotionally discipline slaves was clearly considered part of the process of maturation for children of the planter class. Before long, children of the planter class had absorbed the affective dynamics of slavery, and began exercising their ability to provoke slaves’ feelings, in particular how to scare or intimidate them, even without parents present. Edward Pollard recalled that as a child they plagued slaves with a number of what he termed “practical jokes,” ranging from pelting them with apples to ordering slaves “out of the fields” to go on fake “errands.”²¹⁴ Though he declared that these “joke” were not rooted in “cruelty,” he openly confessed that they were governed by a desire for vengeance. Pollard explained that adult slaves were often responsible for disciplining Pollard and his brother, and admitted that the siblings “perpetrated revenge for such ‘rough kindness’ on the old ill-natured blacks.” He was mortified or angered enough to be disciplined by these slaves that he felt the need to

²¹³ Williams Wells Brown from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin’ On Ole Massa*, 183-184

²¹⁴ Edward A. Pollard *Black Diamonds*, 50-51; He further justified his actions by explaining that in all these actions his enslaved “playmates” served as “conspirators in the deed,” and indeed “No one enjoyed the sport more heartily than our sable companions.” Perhaps they did enjoy watching elders they had been taught to respect be tricked and pelted with fruit, or perhaps they were unwilling conspirators in Pollard’s efforts to exercise his nascent power. Interestingly, Harriet Jacobs’ brother decried the “meanness” of his “young master,” in particular that the young man would trick the elderly enslaved “man who kept a fruit stand” with counterfeit coins. Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 18-19

assert his authority over them in some way. This was especially clear in the delight he received from sending slaves on “fools’ errands,” thus revealing that though a child, he had the power to command them.

Throughout Pollard’s narrative it is clear that many “practical jokes” perpetrated against slaves were, in fact dress rehearsals for wielding authority and fear as a grown slaveholder. Pollard wrote at length about a devout and “very passionate” old enslaved woman named Aunt Judy, and how he and his brother “thoughtlessly” and “wrongly – delighted to tease and annoy her.” Dick in particular, targeted Judy for her religious fervor, calling her “‘The Preacher,’ or sometimes ‘Old Nat Turner,’” threatening her with “warnings about the tragic fate of Nat Turner.” Not content with mocking her faith Dick also felt compelled to intimidate the woman with the intimation that if she was too outspoken then she would meet the same fate as the insurrectionary Turner. Little wonder then that Pollard believed that their “boyish plaguing of” Judy “was sometimes replied to in great bitterness.”²¹⁵

Young girls of the planter class were also learning how to inspire fear and intimidation in the slaves around them. While traveling through an area with a large slave population, Fredrick Law Olmsted met an adolescent girl of the planter class “on the public road.” As they spoke, an old enslaved man walked by and she stopped him to “demand to know where he was going, and by what authority” before commanding “him to face about and return to his plantation.” When the enslaved man “hesitated” she responded with:

“turbulent anger... threatening that she would have him well whipped if he did not instantly obey. The man quailed like a spaniel, and she instantly resumed the manner of a lovely child with me, no more apprehending that

²¹⁵ Edward A. Pollard *Black Diamonds*, 76-77

she had acted unbecomingly, than that her character had been influenced by the slave's submission to her caprice of supremacy."²¹⁶

This passage speaks volumes about how children of the planter class understood the fissures that structured the emotional politics of slavery. First of all, Olmsted watched as the girl felt first anger, which made the man feel fear (or at least to “quail...like a spaniel,” in a manner so convincing that the young girl and Olmsted were fooled.) and the “caprice of supremacy” that provoked this fear seemed to make her happy. She was quick to don the role of authority figure, and, in turn, was appeased if not pleased by the enslaved man's display of fear. Also, though only twelve, the young girl had learned that to adopt different “fronts” for behaving towards slaves (or people of color) and towards white people (of her class.) As she seamlessly returned to being “a lovely child” while interacting with a white man, she revealed that she had learned what emotions were appropriate and inappropriate for addressing slaves, and non-slaves.²¹⁷

As Olmsted's passage suggests, young members of the planter class would have quickly learned that in the plantocracy they could not only exert control over slaves on their own plantation, any slave could be subject to their wiles. William Wells Brown described how one day, while running errands for his master, he was randomly “attacked by several large boys, sons of slave-holders, who pelted me with snowballs...stones and sticks, until they overpowered me.” Though he did not belong to any of their families after Brown allegedly “hurt” one of his assailants the boy's father punished him by

²¹⁶ Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveller's Observations on Cotton and Slavery In the American Slave States, 1853 – 1861* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996) 574

²¹⁷ For more on displaying different “fronts” in different interactions and based on status, see Erving Goffman *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1990) I discuss “fronts” and inappropriate and appropriate affective behavior further in the introduction.

beating him so severely that “It was five weeks before I was able to walk again.”²¹⁸ This served as a lesson for the boys as well as Brown that slaveholders could enact their desires on slaves’ bodies without retribution.

Enslaved people continued to mark slaveholding children’s paths to adulthood, as slaveholding families often celebrated children’s rites of passage with gifts of slaves. In June of 1819 John Perkins visited his sister Sarah, her husband Edward Broughton, and their children, Jane, James, Henrietta and John Perkins Broughton in Natchez, Mississippi. While in town, Perkins contracted a slave sale as a gift to his sister’s children. The bill of sale noted that “in consideration of his natural love and affection which the said John Perkins hath and beareth” for his nieces and nephews, he sold them six enslaved people for the modest sum of five dollars. If it was not already clear from this dramatically low price and the language of “love and affection” that this was a gift, the bill went on to say that the sale of the slaves was intended “for the better maintenance and schooling and support” of the four children.²¹⁹ His hopes for their secure financial future and education were embodied as six people (who no doubt had their own hopes and dreams of a different future.)

Planter parents typically gave their children a slave to commemorate a momentous occasions in a child's life, and slave documents provide a glimpse of the nostalgia, love, pride and loss parents may have been feeling about these events. A slave sale from Nov. 1, 1837 announced that "My son Doct. W. Thomas Brent being on the eve

²¹⁸ Williams Wells Brown from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1969) 186-187

²¹⁹ Natchez Trace Collection Slaves and Slavery Collection, box 2.325, v48, Folder 2, The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin; Similarly, James Gillespie gave his daughter Mary Winston two enslaved families as a token of “love and affection” on April 1, 1854. Gillespie (James A. and Family) Papers, MSS 669, Folder 1:5, LLMVC, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge.

of leaving me” in order to move to Louisiana “I have this day given to him.....two boys named Aaron aged about 22 years and William aged about 16 years," signed by his father, George Brent.²²⁰ Marriages were another ritual of the slaveholding family marked by and through the gifting of enslaved people. Documents from the antebellum South reveal frequent references to slaveholding parents giving enslaved people as a wedding gift, typically to the bride to serve as a dowry.²²¹

As children of the planter class grew up enslaved people continued to come to the fore in their relationships with their parents. James W.C. Pennington claims that many slaveholders developed complexes about competing with their fathers. “The young master not being able to own as many slaves as his father, usually works” the few slaves he owns “more severely.”²²² Caleb Green, a slaveholder in Louisiana, wrote a number of letters to his father, but tellingly opened one letter to his father with a confession that he had been avoiding writing him out of his shame of being in debt and not yet turning a profit on land due to the “mania for land speculation.”²²³ Edward Pollard’s memories of and feelings for slaves seemed ineluctably intertwined with those he had for his parents, mentioning their deaths in the same breath. He described how an enslaved woman named Marie passed away, and how she “numbered...among those whom, with love-lit eyes, I

²²⁰ Slavery Manuscript Collection (collection # 503) Folder 30, Hill Memorial Library, Tulane University

²²¹ William Craft described how his wife of Ellen Craft, was a particularly loaded gift to a young bride. Ellen’s father was her master, and when her mother “became so annoyed at” how often Ellen was “mistaken for a child of the family,” she gave the eleven years old Ellen to one of her white daughters “as a wedding present.” William explained that this act “separated my wife from her mother, and also from several other dear friends.” Thus because of a wife’s jealousy, one daughter, the embodiment of her father’s infidelity, was given to another, to commemorate her wedding. A gift intended to represent one family’s hopes for their newly-married daughter’s future also meant that at eleven years old, Ellen was torn from her own family.

William Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles For Freedom; Or, The Escape of William and Ellen Craft From Slavery*, (Salem, NH: Ayer Company Publishers, Inc. 1991) 2

²²² James W.C. Pennington from *Five Slave Narratives*, 73

²²³ Slaveholding would have been a particularly interesting issue for Caleb and his father as Caleb wrote that though he owned slaves he supported gradual emancipation, while his father was an abolitionist who called for immediate emancipation. Caleb Green Jr. Letter, MSS 480, HNOC

can so often see beckoning to me from Heaven,” including his “beloved parents, who folded their hands meekly in their age and died,” his brother and sister, “and with them and among them the dear, old, familiar blacks of my boy’s home.”²²⁴

Perhaps because slaves played such an integral role in how slaveholders’ childhood emotional development, enslaved people could seemingly trigger emotions that even slave owners’ parents could not. Edward Pollard revealed as much when he described his departure from home as a young man through an emotional scene with a slave, not with his parents. Pollard recalled that as he was preparing to leave home for the first time “to adventure into the world,” his “heart was swelling, defiant, joyous,” though he admitted to a few “last tears...dropped on my mother’s bosom.” This “exultation” at the prospect of “adventure” continued until he was “waiting for the boat” that was to take him on his “journey,” and he saw “poor old gray-headed Uncle Jim” approaching with Pollard’s luggage. As Jim “stood watching my departure with loud fervent blessings,” Pollard remembered that his “heart was struck with a peculiar grief.” He grew saddened at the idea that he would get to experience the “innumerable joys” that the vast world contained, while Jim would “return to the drudgery of the stupid old fields, condemned never to see the fine world.” He didn’t say if he let Jim see him cry, but he mentioned giving him “two whole dollars to console him,” though his recollection of the scene suggested that it was Pollard who needed the consoling.²²⁵ This scene reveals how, for Pollard, enslaved people became inextricably linked to his feelings about home, childhood, and his own pasts. In this way he imbued slaves with affective meaning,

²²⁴ Edward A. Pollard *Black Diamonds*, 97-98

²²⁵ *ibid.*, 42-43

which explains how seeing a slave he did not know on a train could incite a flood of emotions.

Perhaps because members of the planter class forged their familial affections through slaves, over time slaveholders showed love for one another with slaves, a process that began during courtship process.²²⁶ According to Catherine Clinton, the first step for men of the planter class who wished to marry was to “inherit...property” or find “a profession,” as “he could not expect a father to release his daughter” to a man who was not “financially secure.”²²⁷ Slaves were the best evidence of one’s solvency and thus potential as a suitor. While traveling through the Lower Mississippi Olmsted met a “gentleman in an inland Southern town” who confessed to him “I have now but one servant; if I should marry, I should be obliged to buy three more, and that alone would withdraw from my capital at least three thousand dollars.”²²⁸ This man understood that his very ability to marry was determined by the number of slaves he can afford. Thus slaves not only shaped feelings, they could determine the course of one’s affective life.

Olmsted’s passage also suggests that while families of brides might be concerned about providing slaves as part of a dowry the number of slaves one could buy was also a concern for Southern men on the brink of marriage (or looking to extend bachelorhood.) Because of this, purchases of slaves by single men could be seen as a sign of courtship. When Moses Grandy was trying to purchase his freedom for the price of \$600, which his

²²⁶ For more on the courtship practices of members of the planter class see Catherine Clinton *The Plantation Mistress: Woman’s World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) 60-65; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese *Within The Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988) especially the Prologue and Chapter 1; Steven M. Stowe *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987)

²²⁷ Catherine Clinton *The Plantation Mistress*, 60

²²⁸ For a study of the courtship practices of enslaved people see Emily West, *Chains of Love: Slave Couples in Antebellum South Carolina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom*, 239

master had paid for him, his master protested that a Captain Cormack had offered a thousand dollars for Grandy. Grandy scoffed at this, telling his master “I know what made him say so; he is courting Miss Patsey, and he did it to make himself look big.” At this remark both his mistress and master “laughed...knowing that I spoke the truth.”²²⁹ Clearly slave and slaveholder alike knew that a suitor might try to emphasize his wealth and attractiveness as a mate by showing not only that he could purchase slaves, but that he would pay dearly for them.

Slaves were not only proof that a suitor was ready for and worthy of marriage, they were sometimes integral to the rituals of courtship. Catherine Clinton points out that in the Antebellum South, unlike in the North, “Courting couples” had to be supervised at all times. Because of this regulation, meant to insure the bride’s chastity, a family member was “always in the room,” and if no relative was available then “a female slave is seated on the rug at the door.” One Southern planter even confessed to drugging one such slave with “laudanum” in order to covertly steal a kiss from his intended.²³⁰ Thus enslaved people provided security, for a groom’s finances and a bride’s propriety, without which a wedding amongst the planter class could not have taken place.

Enslaved people could also serve as vehicles for displaying affection throughout the course of slaveholder marriages. In his 1801 will, Pierre Metoyer requested that the enslaved woman Marie Suzanne take care of his wife and their youngest son until his wife’s death, or for “as long as” the two women were “content with each other.”²³¹ In this way Marie Suzanne embodied and enacted the emotional bonds of the Metoyer family, as

²²⁹ Moses Grandy in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium*, 20

²³⁰ Catherine Clinton *The Plantation Mistress*, 63

²³¹ April 27, 1801 Last Will and Testament of Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer, Joe Henry Collection, folder #8, 8-10, Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Watson Memorial Library, Northwestern State University of Louisiana

a caretaker for Metoyer's son and wife. Because he intended Marie Suzanne's "services" to continue after his death, she became a manifestation of his own memory and love for his family, a post-mortem valentine, or a living elegy. By willing that Marie Suzanne take care of his wife after his own death, Pierre Metoyer was making the enslaved woman into a token of his undying love for his wife, but after his death Marie Suzanne would also become a proxy for the care he could no longer give.

Since enslaved people were integral to forming the ties that bonded the slaveholding family it is little wonder that family strife also played out through slaves. Evelina Prescott wrote to her father on February 14th of 1856 to express her dismay that some slave children that she had received in the partition of a relative's will were really intended for her sister. Prescott protested the decision, in part because of the affection that she and her children felt for the two slave boys, George and Spencer. Evelina claimed that they would be stung by the "pang of separation" at losing George, whom she professed to have "nursed with my own milk," and that her "children were so much attached" to Spencer.²³² Evelina's plea highlights the complicated relationships and unexpected intimacies that existed within slaveholding families, and between slaveholders and the enslaved. While Evelina purported to want to keep the children because of how "attached" they had become to the entire family, she seemed equally concerned with what amounted to a sibling rivalry with her sister, the supposed owner of

²³² The attachment that slaveholders felt (or purported to feel) for slaves was common enough that Douglass described a slave mistress's feelings for two enslaved men, named Henry and John, saying that she "was very much attached – after the southern fashion – to Henry and John," because they had "been reared from childhood in her house." Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom* Edt. With an introduction and Notes by John David Smith (New York: Penguin Books, 2003 [1855]) 214-215; Michael D. Wynne Collection, (Moore, John and Family Papers) #2973, W-31, Folder 2. Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge. Evelina seemed to think that these bonds of affection should be sufficient to supersede any legal claim her sister had.

George and Spencer. The wording of the letter seemed juvenile, as she wrote her father “Sister says I must send her slaves to her,” as did the fact that Evelina was involving her father in the matter at all. Later in the letter she suggested that she would accept her father’s judgment, though she bitterly noted that she “was never so fortunate as her” sister. Did the Prescotts really feel so heartbroken about the potential “separation” from the enslaved boys, or did Evelina want to undermine her sister, financially and in the eyes of their father? Does the fact that Evelina resorted to speaking of the “attachment” she had to the slaves indicate that in the nineteenth-century affective claims could compete with legal ones? And did George and Spencer stay with Evelina and her family, or were they sent to her sister? This letter raises far more questions than it answers, even as it reveals the variety of fissures that could form in slaveholding families because of slaves.

If disciplining slaves could serve as a vector for bonding father and son, punishments that went awry could have vast ramifications for slaveholding family relations. Jacob Stroyer recalled how a slave from a nearby plantation, Jim, stole a pig from Stroyer’s master. Jim was caught, and his master’s son whipped him, before tying a “cured middling of hog...around his neck.” Jim was made to work in the fields by day and be imprisoned by night, all while the meat hung from his neck, until “one morning” he was found dead, the hog meat still hanging from his body. The slaveholder’s father blamed his over-zealous son for Jim’s death, and Stroyer claimed that since “he was very angry at his son...his punishment was, that he was driven from his plantation with orders never to return.” Stroyer suggested that the loss of a valuable slave in such a fashion was unforgivable, and grounds for being disowned. According to Stroyer, his father’s actions “grieved” his son “very much, and he made several attempts to regain his father’s

affection, but failed.” (Stroyer observed that eventually the son came into wealth and his father pardoned him, “But poor Jim was not there to forgive him.”)²³³

Enslaved people were well aware of the fact that all too often they were the casualties of family fights. Frederick Douglass described how shortly after getting married “a misunderstanding took place between” his master and his master’s brother, Hugh Auld, with whom Douglass had been living. Douglass claimed that “as a means of punishing his brother,” his master took him back “to live with himself at St. Michaels. Here I underwent another most painful separation.”²³⁴ This illustrates that when intrafamily disputes were being waged over and through slaves, the emotions of slaves were shaped as well. Because of a fight between brothers, Douglass was forced to face yet another “painful separation” from people he had grown close to.

At times slaves could influence the feelings of members of the planter class simply by strategically manipulating pre-existing intrafamily tensions about slaves. In his narrative of being captured and enslaved Solomon Northup described one such incident of subverting the slaveholding family. In attempting to protect an enslaved woman named Patsey from sexual assault, Northup incurred the anger of his drunken, concupiscent owner, Epps. When Epps tried to exact revenge by pulling a knife on Northup, Northup evaded danger by running to Mistress Epps, who was standing nearby, and telling her what her husband had done. Northup was well aware that Mistress Epps was “possessed of the devil, jealousy” because of the way her husband lusted after Patsey, and he knew that when she was angry Epps often became compliant, “ready to gratify any whim” his wife had. Northup claimed that after he told her she became enraged at both her husband

²³³ Jacob Stroyer in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium*, 51-52

²³⁴ Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 52

and Patsey. Meanwhile Epps, who could easily guess that Northup was disclosing his lascivious behavior to his wife, was duly chastened. In seeking out Mistress Epps in order to provoke her anger and envy, Northup was simultaneously able to stave off an attack on Patsey and himself, while also causing conflict within the Epps marriage.²³⁵ It may only have been a temporary reprieve from violence, but Northup was savvy, and turned the incident into an opportunity to drive a wedge between Epps and his wife, transforming his owner's rage into heartache for Mistress Epps. Thus, slaves like Northup were able to take advantage of conflict amongst their master's families, exploiting tensions between slaveholding husbands and wives, parents and children or siblings in order to gain some benefit, or to deliberately undermine the slaveholding family.

Priscilla "Mittie" Munnikhuysen frequently complained in her diary about the way that her father-in-law ran the Louisiana plantation where she lived with her husband. The day after her twenty-third birthday in 1861 she wrote: "I feel sad – more whipping going on. One poor old man the sufferer of man's passion. Thank God my husband is not so heartless. It is indeed hard to bear." She continued on to complain of her hatred for her harsh father-in-law, concluding her entry with the declaration "I wish he was not Howard's father."²³⁶ The whipping of the old enslaved man reveals the tangle of entwined emotions she had involving her feelings about her husband, her father-in-law, slavery, and the specific slave (as well as perhaps a sign of her feelings about moving to Louisiana from Maryland to marry). Munnikhuysen often wrote about her opposition to slavery, but in the passage above she seemed to conflate her own sorrow with the man's suffering, all while blaming her father-in-law's "passion" for being a cruel slaveholder.

²³⁵ Solomon Northup in *Puttin' On Ole Massa*, 351, 333

²³⁶ Bond (Priscilla "Mittie" Munnikhuysen) Diary, Typewritten Edited Copy, Dairy 1858-1865, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, 60-61

Of course, it's impossible to tell where her disdain for her husband's father as a slaveholder ended, and her hatred for him as her father-in-law began. Nevertheless, her lamentations suggest that how slaves felt could shape the emotions of members of the planter class, which in turn created flashpoints for conflicts over what emotions were appropriate to feel towards and about slaves.

Throughout her diary it seemed that such events were not only about her own distaste for slavery or for her father-in-law, but were also a potential node for engaging issues with her husband. When the plantation's enslaved overseer, Nace, treated a runaway slave cruelly, seemingly at her father-in-law's behest, Howard Munnikhuysen objected to the runaway's treatment. Mittie then made sure to tell her husband "loud enough for his father to hear... 'Howard, if you are going to have a black master over you it is more than I am willing to have,' noting that her father in law "thinks more of Nace than any one of his children," and was more apt to listen to the overseer than to his own kin.²³⁷ This heated conflict suggests a number of things about the ways that the emotional politics of slavery seeped into planter family relations. Since she was clearly intending to be heard by her husband as well as her father-in-law, it's difficult to discern if she was proud of her husband for standing up to his father, or if she thought his actions were insufficient, and proof that he was permitting himself to be cowed by his father and Nace. Though Mittie was opposed to chattel slavery, she was not without her own share of white supremacist sentiments, judging from the way she egged her husband on about having a "black master." Her suggestion that he was allowing himself to be mastered by another man certainly seemed intended to provoke anger in her husband, and to emasculate him. Perhaps this was a constant source of tension with her husband, as they

²³⁷ *ibid*, 64-65

fought over her feelings about slavery versus his own, and those of his father. Or perhaps if he also spoke out about how the runaway slave was treated then they might have bonded over their shared anger at his father, and his slaveholding practices. It is unclear how the runaway slave's fate might have been shaped by this intrafamily conflict, but revealing that a matter of policing slavery could throw so many family tensions into sharp relief.

As "Mittie" Munnikhuysen's writings show, the treatment of slaves could be a major source of conflict between married couples of the planter class, especially when one spouse had antislavery leanings. Fanny Kemble's own diary reveals how her feelings about slavery and slaves became inextricably tied to her own emotions and how she felt about her husband. She recalled having "a long and painful conversation" with her husband, Mr. Butler, about an enslaved woman who Kemble believed was unfairly flogged. Kemble wrote that:

"These discussions are terrible: they throw me into perfect agonies of distress for the slaves, whose position is utterly hopeless; for myself, whose intervention on their behalf sometimes seems to me worse than useless; for Mr. Butler, whose share in this horrible system fills me by turns with indignation and pity."²³⁸

Interestingly, she used similar language to describe the effect of her emotional state and those of the slaves, noting that their "position" was "hopeless" while hers was "worse than useless." Towards her slaveholder husband, however, she felt a mixture of anger and "pity." These fissures would grow increasingly wide as the couple fought over slaves and slavery during their time in Georgia.

Of course, this was not the only reason why spouses might fight over slaves. According to Harriet Jacobs, "white daughters" of the planter class saw firsthand the

²³⁸ Frances Anne Kemble *Journal of a Residence On a Georgian Plantation In 1838-1839*, 62 – 63

impact slaves had on their parents' relationship. Jacobs claimed that after listening to "their parents quarrelling about some female slave" the daughters became "curious" about the source of their parents' strife, and before long "they learn the cause": that their father was engaging in sexual relations with an enslaved woman. Jacobs noted that the daughters might even be "attended by the young slave girls whom their father has corrupted." If so, one can only imagine how that knowledge might have shaped the daily interactions between slaveholding daughters and the "slave girls."²³⁹

Fights over slaves also revealed the extent to which honor and reputation the Antebellum South were based on enslaved people.²⁴⁰ A letter from Charles Batchelor to his mother revealed just how much slaves and slave owning shaped family interactions, and influenced slaveholders' sense of pride. Batchelor wrote to his mother in the winter of 1860 from the Military Institute of Kentucky, to proclaim that he "felt really vexed" to learn of a slave purchase his father made, which Batchelor felt unwise. According to the letter his father had only recently pulled himself out of debt, and Batchelor expressed shock and anger that his father would buy more slaves, and in doing so "plunge...blindly into debt again." Batchelor declared that this irresponsible purchase was "enough to make me repent the day my birth gave me" his father's "name." He bemoaned the fact that he was "studying" diligently at the Institute "in order to make myself worthy," only see his father act so impulsively as to make Batchelor contemplate "abandon(ing) my course to glory." He condemned what he viewed as his father's "extravagance" not only because he

²³⁹ For more on the fights slaveholders couples had over infidelity with slaves see Catherine Clinton *The Plantation Mistress* (1984); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese *Within The Plantation Household* (1988); Deborah Gray White *Ar'n't I a Woman?*; Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 46

²⁴⁰ For more on the ways that slaveholders created their sense of self and their identities to slaves see Walter Johnson *Soul By Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) Chapter Three

owed Batchelor money, but because he clearly staked his very “name,” self-worth and capacity for future “glory” to his family’s success as slaveholders and purchasers.²⁴¹ Nor was Batchelor alone in his perception that how a master bought and treated their slaves could influence their reputation. In an article in *De Bow’s Review* Dr. McTyeire observed that a shivering servant is a shame to any master.”²⁴² This hints that even more than crafting a slaveholder’s sense of pride, slaves could also bring their masters shame in the court of public opinion. This was confirmed by man in Louisiana who swore to Frederick Law Olmsted that “nobody would have respect for a man that treated his niggers cruelly.”²⁴³

Nowhere was the influence of slaves on the emotional life of slaveholders more clear than when slaveholders talked about their fears. Reading through the *De Bow’s Review*, the agricultural journal popular amongst many Southern planters, it is clear that slave owners were afraid of a number of things. They feared crop failure, and that the slave population would “increase” until “their labor will become utterly unprofitable” and unaffordable.²⁴⁴ They feared competition from other American cities and foreign powers.²⁴⁵ They experienced “fear of exposure and shame,” afraid they would lose face

²⁴¹ Batchelor explained that these slaves were a particularly bad investment not only because it was foolhardy to buy slaves so close to “the brink of civil war,” but also because he believed that paying so much for “a set of Western slaves is folly.” Batchelor (Albert A) Papers 1855-1863, MSS 919, S:143, Box 1A, Folder 2A, LLMVC Hill Memorial Library at Louisiana State University

²⁴² For more examples of pro-slavery authors discussing how shame and pride were based on one’s abilities as a master, and determined in the court of public opinion, see D. B. De Bow [The Editor], H. N. McTyeire “Plantation Life—Duties and Responsibilities,” *DeBow’s Review* 29-3 (September 1860) 358; *DeBow’s Review* Vol. XII, “Cotton Planters’ Convention,” 278

²⁴³ Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom*, 277-278

²⁴⁴ *DeBow’s Review* Vol. XII, “Crop and Supply of Cotton,” 17, “Fruit Culture For the South,” 536; *DeBow’s Review* Vol. X, Chancellor Harper’s Memoir on Slavery 56

²⁴⁵ *DeBow’s Review* Vol. III-IV, “The City of Mobile,” 89; *DeBow’s Review* Vol. XII, “Virginia Commercial Convention,” 37, “Crop and Supply of Cotton,” 81, “Sheep Husbandry in the Southern States,” 591-593

with their peers.²⁴⁶ But they were truly concerned about their slaves, which their slaves knew all too well. William Harper admitted that amongst planters there was “fear of insurrection and servile war.”²⁴⁷

These fears pervaded the letters and conversations exchanged by members of the planter class. In an August 1835 letter to his father Caleb Green jr. described the climate of fear and tension that plagued slaveholders in the region. Green claimed that residents in Opelousas, Louisiana were “pretty excited by insurrectionary moments among the slaves.” Green did not think these were imagined anxieties, declaring that “There is no doubt but a widely extended conspiracy has embraced the whole Southwestern country.” He cited examples of slave conspiracy, including a friend of his who “was shot down near his own house” only weeks before, and his wife’s uncle “who, on tasting the water placed in his tumbler at night by his negro found it contained poison.” Green blamed both crimes on slaves, and announcing that at least the slave who attempted to poison their master was “Sent into the chain gangs of New Orleans.”²⁴⁸ Nor did these fears subside with time. In a letter written to his father five years later Green told his father that “insurrections are continually taking place...a few weeks ago a most formidable one was ‘nipped in the bud’ but twenty miles from this place. It aimed at nothing short of indiscriminate slaughter of the whites.” Though this most recent “insurrection” had been uncovered they were not put at ease, for Green wrote ominously that “We are sleeping upon a volcano.”²⁴⁹ A woman in East Texas told Frederick Law Olmsted that though “Northern folks talk about abolishing slavery” it was unthinkable because former slaves

²⁴⁶ *DeBow’s Review* Vol. XII, “Cotton Planters’ Convention,” 278

²⁴⁷ *DeBow’s Review* Vol. X, Chancellor Harper’s Memoir on Slavery 56

²⁴⁸ Caleb Green Jr. Letter August 29, 1835, MSS 480, Folder 1, HNOC

²⁴⁹ Caleb Green Jr. Letter October 5, 1840, MSS 480, Folder 1, HNOC

would “murder us in all in our beds.” As evidence she mentioned that recently a local enslaved woman had “killed her mistress with an axe, and her two little ones.” She assured Olmsted that the perpetrator had been executed, which she hoped would serve as “a good lesson to the rest.”²⁵⁰ One slave alone could seemingly paralyze whole communities with fear. In the summer of 1860 an enslaved man named Battiste was brought up on a variety of charges, including hosting meetings for slaves and “harboring” fugitives. According to court documents “various citizens of Mobile had frequently complained to the police that they lived in terror” because of Battiste, and “were afraid to leave their houses.” He was convicted of being a vagrant and “disorderly person.”²⁵¹

Other slaveholders worked to down-play fears of slaves. According to Molly Rogers, information about slave revolts was often suppressed, and “there was usually little public discussion or even acknowledgment of organized slave unrest.” Even newspapers were tight-lipped on the subject. Rogers claims that a brief “notice might appear in the papers that a revolt had been put down,” but editors would typically insure that the rebellion was “described as if the threat had been inconsequential and its discovery inevitable; it would be minimized to alleviate white fears.”²⁵² This would explain why William Harper dismissed the idea that Southern society was rife with would-be Nat Turners. He claimed that visitors to the South “commonly supposed” that a great deal of time and energy were expended in the “formidable” “task of keeping down insurrection.” Instead, Harper claimed that “fears have been entertained which are

²⁵⁰ Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom*, 303

²⁵¹ He was also charged with repeated burglaries and muggings, and even accused of being deliberately “difficult to arrest” as he “wore his clothes without buttons” in order to change out of them and escape being identified easier. *Withers v. Coyles*, 36 Ala. 320, June 1860.

²⁵² Molly Rogers *Delia’s Tears: Race, Science, and Photography in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010) 145

absolutely ludicrous. We have been supposed to be nightly reposing over a mine, which may at any instant explode.” Yet Harper claimed that there were no more threats of insurrection and “overthrow of government” in the South than in any other “civilized” society. He claimed that those who did revolt did so only when “resentful passion” drove them to “revolt.”²⁵³ This hinted that some white Southerners viewed fear as an inappropriate feeling to have about slaves, or that masters did not give rein to their “passion” like slaves did.²⁵⁴

Enslaved people were well aware of what their masters feared, and sought to deliberately invoke that fear. A number of historians have written about how slaves used deceit or theft as “self-defense.” Eugene Genovese cites the work of historians like Herbert Aptheker and Kenneth Stampp in arguing “that the oppressed have a right to use available weapons to protect themselves, their families, and their people against continuous aggression from above.”²⁵⁵ I would argue that invoking fear in their masters, through overt acts of violence and through more subtle forms of inducing fear, were another weapon in enslaved people’s arsenals.

Some adult slaves may have told slaveholding children stories in an effort to invoke their fear and respect. According to Edward Pollard there were a number of slaves

²⁵³ DeBow’s Review Vol. X, Chancellor Harper’s Memoir on Slavery 51-52

²⁵⁴ Interestingly, some court cases suggest that fear of a slave alone was not necessarily sufficient evidence of wrongdoing. In 1856 Alabama slaveholder Elias Hodges claimed that his slave Anthony had tried to murder Hodges and his wife. The court claimed that there could be “no indictment” without the state “proving that the substance employed....was a deadly poison.” Unsubstantiated accusations that a slave was trying to kill their master were even used to prove insanity in a Georgia court. In the case of *Dicken v. Johnson* a slaveholder was said to be “repeatedly deranged - so much so that he appeared to be afraid that his own negroes would kill him.” *Anthony (a slave) v. State*, 29 Ala. 27, June 1856 ; *Dicken v. Johnson*, 7 Ga. 484, November 1849

²⁵⁵ Eugene D. Genovese *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976) 607

on the plantation who scared him as a child. He recalled one enslaved woman whose tales would:

“fill our youthful minds with awe, superstition, and an especial dread of being alone in dark rooms. We are told by her of every variety of ghosts, of witches that would enter through the key-hole....and worse than all, of awful and terrible visions that had been afforded her of the country of the dead.”²⁵⁶

It is notable that these stories made them feel “awe,” which the woman may have very well intended. She clearly wanted them to believe that her powers were uniquely hers, and not accessible by all, as she proclaimed that she was “afforded” “visions....of the dead.” She also told the Pollard children that a bird that was common in the area who was notable for its “plaintive” song possessed “the transmigrated soul of a little child that had been the victim of the cannibalism of its parents,” and she claimed that the bird “perpetually” called out the song:

““My mammy kill me,
My daddy eat me,
All my brudders and sisters pick my bones,
And throw them under the marble stones.””²⁵⁷

These stories were not only intended to instill slaveholding children with dread of everyday people and things (the dark, birds, and their own parents, who might eat them) they also emphasized the unique powers and abilities of the enslaved woman. Similarly, another enslaved woman would frequently tell Pollard that she could communicate with his dead sister, Rosalie.²⁵⁸ Perhaps she too was trying to scare him, or to establish some power over him as a way of communicating with his sister. In either case these enslaved women were presenting themselves as people to be feared and respected, but also as a

²⁵⁶ Heather Montgomery *An Introduction to Childhood: Anthropological Perspectives on Children's Lives* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) 169

²⁵⁷ Edward A. Pollard *Black Diamonds*, 75-76

²⁵⁸ *ibid*, 116-119

source of salvation through magic or medium abilities. Anthropologist Heather Montgomery suggests that this practice of terrifying children is not atypical, arguing that “a common method of keeping children disciplined is by the use of threats of the supernatural, nonhuman beings that will come to take them away if they misbehave.”²⁵⁹

Some former slaves used the forum of their slave narratives to magnify slaveholders’ fears about their slaves’ intentions. Frederick Douglass refused to disclose how he escaped in his first two narratives, and in his second narrative he explained that he did this in order to “keep the merciless slaveholder profoundly ignorant of the means of flight adopted by the slaves,” hoping that this would leave masters suspended in a heightened state of fear. Douglass asserted that the master “should be left to imagine himself surrounded by myriads of invisible tormentors,” and “be made to feel, that, at every step he takes....he is running the frightful risk of having his hot brains dashed out by an invisible hand.”²⁶⁰ Douglass hoped to keep planters in perpetual terror, never sure not only which slaves wanted to run and how they might do it, but what slaves were possibly plotting their master's death. Solomon Northup also threatened slaveholders with the specter of rebellion, warning that “A day may come – it *will* come.... A terrible day of vengeance, when the master in his turn will cry in vain for mercy.”²⁶¹ Northup emphasized the gravity of his prediction by correcting his initial assessment that rebellion “may come” to the more confident threat that it “will come.” These passages suggest that enslaved people not only worked to deliberately provoke fear in slaveholders, but that this and other ways of influencing slaveholder emotions could perhaps be used to resist

²⁵⁹ Heather Montgomery *An Introduction to Childhood: Anthropological Perspectives on Children's Lives* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) 169

²⁶⁰ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 236

²⁶¹ Solomon Northup in *Puttin' On Ole Massa*, 363

the bounds of slavery. Of course, as I will show in the following chapter, the institution of slavery also profoundly shaped the emotions of enslaved people in a process that began at childhood.

For slaveholders, emotions such as fear would take root, shaping slave codes and the court system for years to come. Whether slaveholders were willing to admit it or not, their emotions and affective practices were fundamentally constructed and irrevocably shaped by enslaved people and slavery. The extent to which joy, fear, family ties and marriages were constructed (and deconstructed) by slaves would become starkly clear in the aftermath of Emancipation, as slaveholders and former slaves sought new ways to define the emotional norms of the Antebellum South.

Chapter Three: “Born and Reared in Slavery”:
Learning the Affective Norms of Slavery

“Children have their sorrows as well as men and women; and it would be well to remember this in our dealings with them.”- Frederick Douglass²⁶²

When Lizzie Gibson was only seven years old she witnessed an event she swore she would “never forget”: a family of enslaved people being dismembered by a slave sale in the middle of a city street. Gibson recalled that she watched as an enslaved man was told, without any warning, that he had been sold away from his family. Before he could process what had been said, or even say goodbye to his wife and children forever, his new owner took him away. Another man proceeded to buy the enslaved man’s wife and his infant child, but was unable to afford the couple’s older child, who was simply told “Tell your mammy good-bye then.” This scene left Gibson paralyzed by emotion, crying “briny tears” in the street. Born into slavery in 1852, Gibson claimed that this event filled her with her “first dread of slavery,” and that from that day forward she lived in fear of being sold away from her own family. Witnessing this abrupt division no doubt convinced her that these separations could come at any time, completely unexpectedly, leaving her in a state of perpetual terror and anxiety, long before she ever had to “stand on the block.” Interestingly, these feelings may in some way have prepared her for the sale that she believed was inevitable. Gibson wrote that when the day of her own sale

²⁶² Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom* Edt. With an introduction and Notes by John David Smith (New York: Penguin Books, 2003 [1855]) 33

arrived, though she was separated from her sisters and brothers forever, that the event was not “so hard” as the sale she had seen in the street.²⁶³

This scene reveals a great deal about how enslaved children learned and adapted to the emotional terrain of the Antebellum South. First, Gibson’s writing indicates that enslaved children learned at a very young age that theirs was a world fraught with loss and emotional uncertainty in which they were forced to constantly adapt. Second, it suggests that enslaved children were as likely to learn about the emotional norms that structured the world around them from their own observations as from a loved one. Finally, Gibson hints that the horrifying sale she witnessed helped her come to terms with the possibility of being sold, and in some small way made her own sale not seem “so hard.” This speaks volumes about the methods enslaved children found to cope with the unpredictability and emotional turmoil of slavery. This event may have softened the blow of her eventual sale, but there is little doubt that witnessing another family being sold and experiencing the division of her own family would have played a pivotal role in Gibson’s emotional development.

Slave narratives shed light on how enslaved children learned the emotional norms and boundaries of slavery, and how to affectively navigate interactions with slaveholders. For enslaved children this was a process, shaped by many factors, events, and individuals. As Frederick Douglass observed in his second autobiography, “Nature has done almost nothing to prepare men and women to be either slaves or slaveholders,” and that to learn to be slave or master required lengthy and “rigid training.”²⁶⁴ Children had to undergo training to learn affective control from their families, as well as the many

²⁶³ Gibson would only see her brothers and sisters again at a subsequent auction. Lizzie Gibson in John Blassingame *Slave Testimony* 738-739

²⁶⁴ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 113

members of the plantation community.²⁶⁵ As Gibson's story shows, children would also learn the affective boundaries of slavery from observing the emotionally charged interactions and relationships that unfolded around them.

Nell Irvin Painter claimed that in order to understand slaves as complex individuals "with all the psychological characteristics of human beings," one needed to comprehend their experiences as children, and how their formative years shaped them.²⁶⁶ I am interested in how enslaved children and children of the planter class developed emotionally in the Antebellum South, and how they were inculcated with the affective norms of slavery. I would argue that unlike children of the planter class, enslaved children faced an abbreviated childhood, as they were forced to learn at a young age how to cope with loss, and to emotionally adapt in an unpredictable world. With the help of their family, fictive kin, other adults and children, and their own observations, enslaved children developed an arsenal of affective skills which they could deploy to ward off punishment, gain rewards, or seek comfort and affection. They also learned to censor their own emotions and read the affective expressions of others in order to weather the daily affective negotiations that composed the emotional politics of slavery. This knowledge would help them endure and even resist the bounds of the institution, and

²⁶⁵ There is a perception in the literature on sentimentalism and gender and gender roles in the family in the nineteenth century that women alone were charged with nurturing their children emotionally. This stereotype is still perpetuated by authors of works on child psychology and people conducting child development studies who use the term "mother" in place of "parent" or other gender-neutral terms. Perhaps such studies were conducted only between mothers and children (and thus based on their own set of assumptions) or the author has selected gendered language that perpetuates the notion that women are sole affective caregivers. For more on how gendered ideas about emotions are used to dismiss women, see Sue Campbell "Being Dismissed: The Politics of Emotional Expression," *Hypatia*, 9:3, (Summer, 1994), 46-65. For more on how fathers were also invested in the affective educations of their children see James Marten "Fatherhood in the Confederacy: Southern Soldiers and Their Children," *The Journal of Southern History*, 63:2, (May 1997), 269-292

²⁶⁶ Nell Irvin Painter *Soul Murder and Slavery*, The Fifteenth Charles Edmondson Historical Lectures, Baylor University, April 5-6, 1993 (Waco, TX: Markham Press Fund, Baylor University Press, 1995) 10-11

would prepare them for a life of surviving enslavement, and for the possibility of freedom.

Historian Willie Lee Rose commented in 1982 that despite the increasing "significance psychologists and sociologists attribute to experiences of infancy and youth" in psychological development, little historical scholarship has been done on the subject.²⁶⁷ Almost three decades later, this still remains the case. Children are mentioned in works on plantation communities and slave families, but such works fail to sufficiently explore the emotional development of enslaved children, the many relationships such children forged, and how they affectively adapted to slavery. Even studies that focus more specifically on the experience of slavery for children do not sufficiently address the affective dimensions of slavery, how emotional norms were learned, and how that process related to the emotional development of children of the planter class.²⁶⁸ Studying how enslaved children learned the emotional practices and affective boundaries of slavery will not only provide more insight into slavery as a system, and the daily interactions and negotiations that forged it, it could reveal more about the process of how

²⁶⁷ Willie Lee Rose, *Slavery and Freedom*, ed. William W. Freehling (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) 39

²⁶⁸ See John Blassingame *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, rev. ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Jacqueline Jones *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc., 1995); Deborah Gray White *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* red. ed., (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999); Eugene Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World The Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976); Catherine Clinton *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (Pantheon: 1984); Brenda E. Stevenson *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) For works that more specifically address the experience of enslaved children see Willie Lee Rose, *Slavery and Freedom*, ed. William W. Freehling (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Wilma King *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth Century America*; Nell Irvin Painter *Soul Murder and Slavery*, The Fifteenth Charles Edmondson Historical Lectures, Baylor University, April 5-6, 1993 (Waco, TX: Markham Press Fund, Baylor University Press, 1995); Steven Mintz *Hucks Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Belknap Press, 2004); Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, Joseph C. Miller "Editor's Introduction" *Children in Slavery Through the Ages* ed by Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, Joseph C. Miller (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2009)

children are socialized. Studying the emotional development of children of the Antebellum South sheds light on the lived experiences of enslaved children, the society in which they were raised, and the relationship between social and childhood development.

Writing about how children in the Antebellum South experienced and developed emotions, is complicated, for a number of reasons. First of all, there is the question of who is defined as a “child,” a category that is socially, culturally and temporally constructed.²⁶⁹ Disputes over what defined the category of enslaved child highlight the extent to which enslaved childhoods were brief or non-existent, but always contingent on their master’s desires. In the nineteenth century, the concept of a distinct childhood was quite new. Historian Phillip Aries claims that the idea of “childhood as a special and separate state from adulthood” gained traction among the European aristocracy in the sixteenth century, and reached its zenith in the nineteenth century, with the rise of Sentimental culture and Victorian mores, which placed more importance on children and the family.²⁷⁰ But for enslaved children, childhood was rarely a distinct period, “separate....from adulthood.” Though many slaveholders and pro-slavery texts depicted even adult enslaved people as “childlike,” childhood historian Wilma King observes that “slaves were forced to confront adult situations of work, terror, injustice, and arbitrary power at early ages.”²⁷¹ This meant that for most enslaved children, childhood as a “special and separate state” was brief, or non-existent.

²⁶⁹ Heather Montgomery *An Introduction to Childhood: Anthropological Perspectives on Children’s Lives* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) 56

²⁷⁰ Philippe Aries *Centuries of Childhood* (1965) 128, For more on childhood as a modern construct see Heather Montgomery *An Introduction to Childhood: Anthropological Perspectives on Children’s Lives* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, Joseph C. Miller “Editor’s Introduction” *Children in Slavery Through the Ages* ed by Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, Joseph C. Miller (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2009) 3

²⁷¹ Wilma King *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth Century America*, xviii

The authors of slave narratives suggest that an enslaved person's childhood ended when they became aware of their enslavement. Willie Lee Rose claims that most narratives by people who were enslaved as children included a memory of "a traumatic moment of realizing the limits of being in bondage." Rose claims that this was all a part of a "distinct social process, one that must have taken place for nearly every slave child," a crucial part of learning "how to live under slavery."²⁷² In contrast to Rose, Calvin Schermerhorn claims that enslaved children's "Lack of awareness of the full circumstances of enslavement...encouraged childish resiliency."²⁷³ I would argue that children became all too aware of "of the full circumstances of enslavement" at a young age, and though this cut their childhoods short, this "awareness" helped provide them with the tools necessary to survive the emotional vicissitudes of slavery.

Many slave narratives suggested that the "traumatic moment" of becoming aware of their enslavement put an abrupt end to what had been a happy and carefree childhood. Authors highlight the trope of the epiphany about their enslavement by describing what it was to not fully comprehend their bondage. Henry Bibb hints that his awareness was preceded by the loss of his mother, observing that "the first time I was separated from my mother, I was young and small. I knew nothing of my condition then as a slave."²⁷⁴ Harriet Jacobs also claimed that she came to realize what her bondage meant when her mother passed away, when "for the first time," Jacobs "learned, by the talk around me,

²⁷² Willie Lee Rose, *Slavery and Freedom*, ed. William W. Freehling (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) 38

²⁷³ Calvin Schermerhorn "Left Behind but Getting Ahead" *Antebellum Slavery's Orphans in the Chesapeake, 1820-60* in *Children in Slavery Through the Ages* ed by Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, Joseph C. Miller (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2009) 214

²⁷⁴ Henry Bibb from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1969) 64

that I was a slave.”²⁷⁵ While in actuality the “moment” of realization was more of a series of events, authors of slave narratives were quite clear about what staved off awareness of enslavement, and what triggered epiphanies about one’s slave status.

Some authors of slave narratives insisted that there existed a liminal period early in their childhood when interracial friendships flourished, before slavery had intruded fully into their consciousness. Lunsford Lane claimed that he spent his “early boyhood in playing with the other boys and girls, colored and white,” before any of them “had learned that they were of a superior and I of a subject race.” Frederick Douglass argued that race didn’t matter to children, as much as their need for friends. He highlighted how simple the criteria for friendship were for children, asking: “Are you a child with wants, tastes and pursuits common to children...? Then, were you black as ebony you would be welcome to the child of alabaster whiteness.”²⁷⁶ Ultimately these descriptions of picturesque childhoods (real or imagined) were intended to provide contrast with the moment of awareness of the unequal social relations that were to come.

The authors of slave narratives argued that these epiphanies were inevitable. As Harriet Jacobs explained, the “happy days” of her childhood had to end, blotted out by “that blight, which too surely waits on every human being born to be a chattel.”²⁷⁷ For many enslaved children, comparing their condition to that of their slaveholding companions precipitated this certain “blight.” Henry Bibb discussed how he was

²⁷⁵ Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 9-10; See also Henry Bibb from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin’ On Ole Massa* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1969) 64 on the loss of his mother.

²⁷⁶ Some pro-slavery authors also employed this trope of childhood as egalitarian and free of race-based prejudice. Slaveholder Edward Pollard recalled that his enslaved friends “in all the affairs of fun and recreation, associated with us on terms of perfect equality.” Edward A. Pollard *Black Diamonds Gathered in the Darkey Homes of the South* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968) 50-51; Lunsford Lane in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968) 6, 49-50; Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom* Edt. With an introduction and Notes by John David Smith (New York: Penguin Books, 2003 [1855]) 59

²⁷⁷ Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 10

separated from his mother as a child to be hired out, aware that his “wages were expended for the education of Harriet White, my playmate,” and the daughter of his master. Bibb explained that “It was then my sorrow and suffering commenced,” and when he “first commenced seeing and feeling that I was a wretched slave, compelled to work under the lash without wages.”²⁷⁸ By comparing his lot with that of his childhood playmate, and realizing that his suffering and labor were marshaled for the benefit of a girl his age, he became aware of what it was to be “a wretched slave,” that he would work without compensation while she received an education. For Bibb, his childhood was effectively over, replaced by “sorrow and suffering.” Meanwhile, Lunsford Lane also reported that he realized that he differed from his “master’s white children” when he recognized that unlike them, he might be sold at any moment. After this he became plagued by fear of being sold away from his loved ones. According to Lane, this realization had a profound emotional impact on him, as he claimed that “all things now made me *feel*, what I had before known only in words, that *I was a slave*.”²⁷⁹

Perhaps such descriptions of a singular realization of bondage were primarily a literary trope, intended to invoke the sympathy of readers steeped in a Victorian culture that adulated children and childhood. Romanticizing their childhoods as a period of happy respite from slavery would certainly heighten any abolitionist and sentimental

²⁷⁸ Henry Bibb from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1969) 65 (reference to her being his childhood playmate p. 64) Similarly, Lunsford Lane “discovered the difference between myself and my master’s white children” when it occurred to him that when “he began to work,” they were being taught to read, “while I was not permitted to have a book in my hand.” Lunsford Lane in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (New York: Arno Press & the New York Times, 1968) 7, 8

²⁷⁹ Interestingly Lane suggests that there might have been a similar process of realization for slaveholding children, as he described how his master’s children abruptly “began to order me about, and were told to do so by my master and mistress.” Just as Bibb and Lane had compared their situation to that of slaveholding children and realized the extent of their bondage, it seems that members of the planter class were also becoming aware of the dynamics of slavery. Lunsford Lane in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968) 7, 8

reader's umbrage at the fact that these contented children had ultimately been robbed of their carefree youth. Or maybe these writers really experienced a transformative moment or series of realizations about the extent of their enslavement. There was perhaps a grain of truth in these scenes, speaking to the author's sense, as adults, that their childhood had been abbreviated at best, and that it had never been like the youths of children of the planter class. According to Rose, how enslaved children negotiated these "crises" likely had "very serious consequences for slaves' future pattern of response."²⁸⁰ This suggests that how these realizations were resolved could determine a great deal about their "future" in slavery, and how they adapted emotionally to the institution.

Studying children in any field is often made difficult by the problem of sources. Studying their behavior itself is complicated, a problem compounded by the distinct lack of source material on children, in particular, those who were enslaved; not many people wrote about children, and children themselves left even fewer sources.²⁸¹ Wilma King notes that enslaved children have often been overlooked by scholars "because they, more than other enslaved persons, were" in the words of Willie Lee Rose "silent and invisible."²⁸² Historians point out that when former slaves recorded their experiences as enslaved children years later, these recollections have been "filtered through later experiences."²⁸³ In her work on the enslaved couples in South Carolina, Emily West

²⁸⁰ Willie Lee Rose, *Slavery and Freedom*, ed. William W. Freehling (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) 38

²⁸¹ Child psychologist Judy Dunn observes that "It is a hazardous business attempting to establish the nature of children's understanding simply from observing" them. Judy Dunn "Understanding Feelings: The Early Stages" from *Making Sense: The Child's Construction of the World* ed by Jerome Bruner and Helen Haste (New York: Methuen, 1987) 26

²⁸² Wilma King *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth Century America*, xviii; Willie Lee Rose, *Slavery and Freedom*, 39, xix

²⁸³ Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, Joseph C. Miller "Editor's Introduction" *Children in Slavery Through the Ages* ed by Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, Joseph C. Miller (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2009) 1

argues that “even with imperfect recall” or memories of childhood that “may have dimmed with age” such narratives “hold immense historical value,” and can even provide insight into a “child’s perspective” of bondage.²⁸⁴

All of these factors meant that childhood in the Antebellum South not only looked different from childhood in the South today, it also varied wildly for the enslaved and free children living under slavery. Former slave Madison Jefferson hinted at how different his childhood in Virginia was from that of a free child when he bitterly observed in an 1841 interview: “How pleasing in general are the reminiscences of the days of our youth! How wont are we ... to exclaim... ‘they were the happiest hours of my existence!’ It is not so, however, with the little slave.”²⁸⁵ Because of these all-important differences, Wilma King cautions against presentism when trying to locate the historical experience of enslaved children, and urges scholars to remember that childhood in the nineteenth century was heavily contingent on race, class and gender.²⁸⁶ The importance of understanding the affective experience of children in the Antebellum South means that scholars need to be aware of these difficulties, and read across sources about childhood to understand how certain memories are recalled.²⁸⁷ Some slave narratives in particular shed

²⁸⁴Emily West was primarily defending her use of the recollections of WPA interviews, but the argument, that recollections of childhood should not be discarded out of hand as untrustworthy, remains useful for me. Emily West *Chains of Love: Slave Couples in Antebellum South Carolina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004) 7

²⁸⁵ Madison Jefferson, in John Blassingame *Slave Testimony*, 216

²⁸⁶ Nell Irvin Painter also warns those who would embark on affective studies of slavery that one can not expect to apply a “literal translation of twentieth-century psychology into the culture of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century societies.” Nell Irvin Painter *Soul Murder and Slavery*, The Fifteenth Charles Edmondson Historical Lectures, Baylor University, April 5-6, 1993 (Waco, TX: Markham Press Fund, Baylor University Press, 1995) 8; Wilma King *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth Century America*, xix

²⁸⁷ As if to counter potential accusations that they did not remember their early childhoods, slave narrative authors often described events as leaving “lasting impression,” or being moments “never to be forgotten.” For example see Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom* Edt. With an introduction and Notes by John David Smith (New York: Penguin Books, 2003 [1855]) 40, 60; Henry Brown *Narrative of the Life of*

light on the experience of enslaved children. Frederick Douglass describes his emotional development as a child, particularly in his second narrative. Harriet Jacobs' narrative is incredibly useful as a text about how enslaved children become inculcated into the emotional norms of slavery because she devotes a great deal of time to discussing her own childhood as a slave. As a mother locked away in hiding, observing her children from her grandmother's attic, she also had the tragic experience of watching from an intimate distance as her children grew up in slavery.

In order to learn the emotional norms of slavery children of the Antebellum South needed to understand the social hierarchies of their world, and their place within them. Childhood anthropologist Heather Montgomery observes that a child "is born into a complex web of social relationships that are further transformed by its arrival," and therefore children need to understand the rules and structure of this "web" in order to "become active members within it."²⁸⁸ This was equally true in the Antebellum South, where enslaved children would learn to navigate the "complex web" of Southern slavery through observing the affective behavior of the people around them. Simply by watching how people affectively interacted over time children began to identify the fault lines of power in the relationships around them.

Henry Box Brown, written by himself, introduction by Richard Newman, Foreword by Henry Louis Gates, Jr (New York, (Oxford University Press, 2002) 16

Many narratives also included mentions of stories about their childhoods that their parents had told to them over time. Though the authors themselves might not remember the events described to them, only that the stories were oft-repeated, the lessons embedded in the stories their parents recounted to them were revealing. See Henry Brown *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown*, (2002) 16 for lessons about facing separation; Williams Wells Brown from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1969) 183-184 for lessons on disciplining slaves through "Virginia Play"; Williams Wells Brown from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa*, 187 for stories about Brown's infancy.

²⁸⁸ For more on how children learn how to affectively relate to others by observing power dynamics between the people around them see Judy Dunn "Understanding Feelings: The Early Stages" from *Making Sense: The Child's Construction of the World* ed by Jerome Bruner and Helen Haste (New York: Methuen, 1987) 30-31; Heather Montgomery *An Introduction to Childhood*, (2009) 106

A passage from Fanny Kemble's diary of her time on her husband's three Georgia plantations reveals how quickly children of the planter class seemed to absorb information about the politics of slavery. Kemble remarked that she didn't know how or where her daughter "gathered her information" but she remarked that "children are made of eyes and ears, and nothing, however minute, escapes their microscopic observation." As a result, one day her daughter announced to an enslaved woman named Mary "some persons are free and some are not...I am a free person, Mary – do you know that?" The woman replied "Yes, missis." The child continued to press the issue, asking if Mary was aware that not all people were free until the woman finally replied "Yes, missis, *here*...I know it is so here, in this world," but that she had "hope" that it would not always be so.²⁸⁹ This passage speaks volumes about how free children came to understand the social world outside of their families. Kemble's daughter already understood that she, at three years old, had rights that an enslaved woman did not. Her repeated questioning of the woman suggests that in asking Mary about her freedom, she was seemingly asking the woman 'Do you know that I have more power than you?' If slaveholding children had already recognized the hierarchies of the Antebellum South then enslaved children likely did as well, and realized how very little social power they possessed.

According to Margaret Mead, children learned the hierarchies of the society around them by learning the "the essential avoidances," what was dangerous or taboo, who had power over them, and, of course, the ramifications for violating the hierarchical rules that bound them. Young Samoan children were told not to put their hands in fire, or to play with knives, but they were also told "not to touch" sacred objects like "the kava bowl, or the kava cup." If "their father is a chief" they were taught how to act in his

²⁸⁹ Frances Anne Kemble *Journal of a Residence On a Georgian Plantation In 1838-1839* (1992) 4-5

presence and home. Through “occasional cuffings” and “exasperated shouting” if they did touch any of these sacred or dangerous objects, children learned by the age of “six or seven” that overstepping the boundaries of social hierarchies was as dangerous as playing with fire.²⁹⁰ This would be an especially important lesson for enslaved children to learn.

Growing up a slave in Maryland, Frederick Douglass worked to learn more about the hierarchies of slavery and the particulars of his master. He did this in part through discerning how the slaves around him felt about Col. Lloyd, noting that the “name” of his master “seemed ever to be mentioned with fear and shuddering,” and never “mentioned with affection but always with fear.”²⁹¹ Even before he met Captain Lloyd, he knew how much power was wielded by the man with “the ominous title of ‘old master’” by the emotional reaction other slaves had to the man. In this way, Douglass quickly learned to fear the man, and to avoid him.²⁹²

Enslaved children also had to learn how the hierarchy of their family intersected with the power structures of slavery. Harriet Jacobs described how her brother William was schooled in the complicated webs of power that surrounded him “when his father and his mistress both happened to call him at the same time.” William “hesitated” before responding, unsure who “had the strongest claim upon his obedience,” before deciding to answer the call of his mistress. Afterwards, their father chastised him for this decision. When William confessed that he “didn’t know which I ought to go to first,” their father replied “You are *my* child...and when I call you, you should come immediately, if you

²⁹⁰ Margaret Mead *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization*, 18, 20

²⁹¹ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom* Edt. With an introduction and Notes by John David Smith (New York: Penguin Books, 2003 [1855]) 33-34

²⁹² *ibid* 36, 63.

have to pass through fire and water.”²⁹³ Clearly enslaved parents still held disciplinary sway over their children, but at a young age William already recognized that his father was not the only person he answered to, nor was his father the highest authority on the plantation.

Well aware of the power their parents held over them it was sobering for enslaved children when they began to realize that they, and their parents, were subject to many other authority figures. Jacob Stroyer would never forget the day he was beaten by a groom in the stable where he worked, which was “the first time” he had ever “been whipped by anyone except father and mother.” Stroyer appealed to his parents for help, which resulted in both his mother and Stroyer himself being whipped. Confronted with this injustice, it occurred to Stroyer for the “first” time that he “with my dear father and mother and the rest of my fellow Negroes, was doomed to cruel treatment through life, and was defenseless.” Now realizing that his parents were also subject to the groom’s cruelty, Stroyer “concluded to appeal to the sympathy of the groom, who seemed to have full control over me.” Once he realized the hierarchies of the social world around him, and the relative power that he and his parents possessed, Stroyer’s first instinct was to appeal to the “sympathy” of the groom who had beaten him but alas, his “pitiful cries” were to no avail.²⁹⁴ Now that Stroyer comprehended the social hierarchies that structured his world, he would need to learn new ways to navigate the emotional politics of enslavement. As Stroyer no doubt learned from this encounter, in order to understand the

²⁹³ Harriet Jacobs suggested that these lessons were particularly difficult for her and her brother to grasp, because their father had “more of the feelings of a freeman than is common among slaves.” Consequently, her brother William “was a spirited boy, and being brought up under such influences, he early detested the name of master and mistress.” Little wonder then that as a twelve year old Willie still possessed “the same aversion to the word master that he had when he was an urchin of seven years.” Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 11, 18

²⁹⁴ Jacob Stroyer *My Life in the South in Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968) 17-18

emotional politics of slavery, children in the Antebellum South not only needed to determine the *social* hierarchies of the institution, they needed to calculate the *affective* hierarchies that surrounded them, who would emotionally respond to them, and when.

According to Heather Montgomery, parents are considered responsible for “teaching” children “to control their emotions,” a crucial element of child development and socialization.²⁹⁵ Sources indicate this was equally true in the Antebellum South. Although enslaved and free children alike needed to learn the emotional norms of slavery, Willie Lee Rose suggests that free and planter children were socialized in very different ways. Rose argued that “slave parents, in ways different than slave owners, acculturated slave youngsters in processes of ‘getting along’” providing their children “training for bondage.”²⁹⁶ Growing up in the Antebellum South, enslaved children in particular had to learn how to police their feelings, and the dangers of failing to do so. In the next section I will explore how enslaved children came to understand what emotions to conceal or display, and how to master the intense emotions brought on by separation from the very people who might soothe them.

Enslaved children quickly learned that different emotional expressions were permissible in the home and outside of it. As a young jockey in the stables of his master, Stroyer was frequently whipped by his overseer, Mr. Young. Stroyer told his parents that Young was “beating” him “too much,” that he would “not stand it,” and that he planned to “fight” the overseer. His father cautioned him not to react with anger, because then the overseer would believe “that your mother and I advised you to do it, and it will make it hard for your mother and me, as well as for yourself.” Instead he told Stroyer to “do your

²⁹⁵ Heather Montgomery *An Introduction to Childhood*, 60-68, 168, see chapter 6 “Discipline, Punishment and Abuse.”

²⁹⁶ Willie Lee Rose, *Slavery and Freedom*, 40

work the best you can, and do not say anything.”²⁹⁷ This incident revealed the role of parents in educating their children about the emotional negotiations of slavery. Though Stroyer might be angry, he sought advice from his parents, who cautioned him to control his emotions, and temper his response, and in fact, to express nothing. Members of the plantocracy clearly believed that slave parents were responsible for instructing their children in what was affectively expected of the enslaved, as his father told him that if he *did* fight the man, it would be assumed that it was on the basis of his parents’ advice. Both parents and overseers understood that the home was the primary site for learning the emotional strictures of slavery, and that lack of affective constraint could have far-reaching consequences. Thus if his mother and father were disciplined for Stroyer’s lack of emotional control, it would serve as a further punishment to Stroyer, and would also be a way of chastising them for failing to fully inculcate their son with the emotional norms of slavery.

According to Wilma King, “Older slaves disguised their feelings and taught their children to do the same.”²⁹⁸ Slave narratives shed light on how enslaved children were given direct instructions about how to behave emotionally, and when to police their own feelings, typically during times of transition. Before Harriet Jacob’s daughter Ellen was sent to the North to wait on her white half-siblings, she was allowed to see her mother for

²⁹⁷ Stroyer may also have been subtly learning about the gendering of the emotional norms of slavery by observing the different ways that his mother and father reacted to his brutal treatment by the overseer. He recalled that after being whipped severely the sight of his “wounds” moved his mother to tears, while his “Father did not show his grief for me as mother did, but he tried to comfort mother all he could.” His father may not have displayed “his grief” by crying “as mother did,” but Stroyer hints that he knew that that was what his father was feeling. Instead, his father exhibited his sadness in the way that he providing emotional support to his wife and son. Jacob Stroyer *My Life in the South in Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968) 20, 25

²⁹⁸ Wilma King *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth Century America*, 19; See also Nell Irvin Painter *Soul Murder and Slavery*, The Fifteenth Charles Edmondson Historical Lectures, Baylor University, April 5-6, 1993 (Waco, TX: Markham Press Fund, Baylor University Press, 1995) 14

the first time in years. Overcome by emotion on the eve of departure, she began to tear up, though she told her mother “Grandmother says I ought not to cry; that I am going to a good place.” Nevertheless, she couldn’t help but weep, because she wouldn’t “have Benny, or grandmother, or uncle Phillip, or any body to love me.” In preparation for leaving, she had been told not to be sorrowful about being sent away, but it was also implied that she was “not to cry” once she was in the North either.²⁹⁹ Perhaps her grandmother wanted their last days together to be happy, or perhaps she knew that an unhappy worker would be seen as less desirable. In either case, Ellen was being ingrained with the notion of what emotions were appropriate, and in which settings. Ellen was also revealing how she coped emotionally with slavery: through the “love” she received from her remaining family members. Her concerns about leaving centered on the idea that she would no longer have anyone around who loved her.

The extent to which enslaved children absorbed lessons about emotional suppression is revealed in the ways that children talked to their parents about feelings on the eve of being separated. When Harriet Jacobs was about to leave by boat to escape North, she stole a moment to see her son Benjamin for the first time in seven years, and to say goodbye to him. During the tearful conversation he revealed that he was sad that he couldn’t join her, but “glad” she was leaving because he had “been *so* afraid they would come and catch you!” Though they were both sorrowful at her departure he subtly encouraged her with his assurances that he was “glad” she was escaping, while also conveying that he feared what would happen if she didn’t depart. In doing so he concealed any heartbreak he might be feeling in order to bolster her spirit before she left, and to keep her from endangering herself by staying. As they parted he promised her that

²⁹⁹ Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 115-116

he would see her again, and soothed her, saying “Don’t cry.”³⁰⁰ Benjamin admitted to his mother that he had been eavesdropping the night that Ellen was brought to see her, so perhaps he had even heard their grandmother say (that night, or on other occasions) that Ellen was “not to cry.” He seemingly took this lesson as both an injunction against tears, and as a message of comfort, and certainly their great-grandmother may have meant both in her advice to her great-granddaughter. In any case, on this emotional night he repressed whatever he was feeling to console his mother in their last moments together, and he urged her to do so as well.³⁰¹

Frederick Douglass’s second autobiography reveals how enslaved children learned to suppress certain feelings not only to comfort others, but also to protect themselves. After witnessing as an enslaved woman named Esther was “severely whipped,” he recalled that “From my heart I pitied her, and – child though I was – the outrage kindled in me a feeling far from peaceful.” In spite of the anger that rose within him, Douglass “was hushed, terrified, stunned, and could do nothing,” fearful that “the fate of Esther might be mine next.”³⁰² The incident sparked both anger and empathy in young Douglass, but these feeling were accompanied by fear, the latter emotion keeping

³⁰⁰ Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 128-129

³⁰¹ Solomon Northup witnessed a similar encounter in a slave pen in Washington, D.C. There he met a ten-year-old slave boy named Randall, who had been separated from his mother Eliza, and his half-sister. According to Northup the boy was distraught at losing his mother, and that he “occasionally would cry, calling for his mother, and wondering when she would come. His mother’s absence seemed to be the great and only grief in his little heart.” Randall was eventually reunited with his mother and half-sister, but their joy at seeing one another again was short-lived, as Randall’s new master refused to buy Eliza and her daughter. Northup recalled Eliza’s outpouring of grief as she was forced to leave Randall: she “embraced him passionately; kissed him again and again; told him to remember her – all the while her tears falling in the boy’s face like rain.” Though Randall was no doubt shaken by the prospect of losing his mother again he mustered up the strength to mask any “grief” he might feel, and to comfort his mother, saying “Don’t cry, mama. I will be a good boy. Don’t cry.” He had keenly felt her absence before, but before his entire family was taken from him his focus was on comforting his mother, with both kind words and the promise of his future “good” behavior. Solomon Northup from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin’ On Ole Massa*, 244-245, 265

³⁰² Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 67

the former in check. This suggests that over time he had learned the very real consequences of certain affective expressions and responses, and that it was best to quell feelings of pity and “outrage” in order to avoid “the fate of Esther.”

If children were typically advised to repress certain feelings, at times they bore witness to the forceful impact of unconcealed emotions. Josiah Henson recalled how when he was “five or six years of age,” he and his siblings, along with their mother, were sold at auction to separate bidders. After watching her other children sold away, Henson’s mother was herself sold and, “half distracted with the parting forever from all her children,” came forward and begged the man to also buy at least one of her children. He responded by beating her brutally, and kicking her. Henson recalled the sound of his mother’s cries, “mingling the groan of bodily suffering with the sob of a breaking heart.”³⁰³ The scene left an indelible mark on Henson, as a traumatic separation from his loved ones, but also as a reminder of how his mother laid her body on the line in an effort to keep her family together. Interestingly, not longer after Henson was sold to another man, he “fell sick,” which he conjectured was perhaps from an “accidental cause” or perhaps stemmed from being “overmastered by such scenes and experiences” as he witnessed at the auction. Convinced that Henson would soon die, his owner convinced his mother’s purchaser to buy the ill boy “at such a trifling rate that it could not be refused. I was thus providentially restored to my mother; and under her care.”³⁰⁴ Though his illness may have been from natural causes, it is notable that he speculated that he became sick because he was emotionally overwrought. Having seen his mother embody her love and sorrow for her children when she cast herself at the feet of her new master,

³⁰³ Josiah Henson *The Life of Josiah Henson*, 4

³⁰⁴ *ibid.*, 4-5

and since Henson not only lived but was returned to his mother, it makes sense that he would firmly believe that one's feelings could be powerful enough to "overmaster" one's body. In learning to suppress emotions enslaved children also saw how powerful affective expression could be.

Wilma King claims that enslaved people fought "to free themselves from the control of others," and I would argue that the fight for freedom of affective expression was part of that struggle.³⁰⁵ Enslaved children like Josiah Henson learned that emotions could not only be suppressed, they could be strategically wielded. As I will continue to show in the next couple of chapters, enslaved people learned how to deploy fear, affection, sorrow and trust in order to navigate the emotional politics of slavery. But enslaved children also learned from their parents and other adults in their community that they could eke out some affective freedom through deliberate efforts to experience love and happiness on their own terms.³⁰⁶ One way that enslaved parents did this was by protecting their children's burgeoning affective selves. Some parents worked diligently to insulate their children from the uncertainties of slavery. As Wilma King asserts "If childhood was a special time for enslaved children," it was due to the efforts of their parents, who "stood between them and slaveholders who sought to control them psychologically and to break their will to resist."³⁰⁷

³⁰⁵ Wilma King *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth Century America*, 1

³⁰⁶ For more on how the affective ties of family helped enslaved people survive and resist slavery see John Blassingame *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Herbert Gutman *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977); Jacqueline Jones *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family From Slavery to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985); Brenda Stevenson *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Emily West *Chains of Love: Slave Couples in Antebellum South Carolina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004) Deborah Gray White *Ar'n't I A Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999)

³⁰⁷ Wilma King *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth Century America*, 1

For many enslaved children, family could function as an emotional bulwark from the totality of the grim reality of slavery.³⁰⁸ Unlike so many enslaved children, Harriet Jacobs was born and raised in a two-parent household “in a comfortable home,” which led her to be “so fondly shielded that I never dreamed I was a piece of merchandise.”³⁰⁹ Living *with* family, not with fictive kin, also helped fortify Frederick Douglass. Douglass claimed that “Living....with my dear old grandmother and grandfather, it was a long time before I knew myself to be *a slave*.” As a result, he knew of “no higher authority over me or the other children than the authority of grandmamma.”³¹⁰ While growing up as a slave outside of St. Louis, Missouri, Mattie Jackson’s parents proved time and time again that the conditions of bondage would not determine the tenor of their relationship. Mattie wrote admiringly of her father, Westly Jackson, and his “deep affection for his family, which the slave ever cherishes for his dear ones.” His commitment to his family was repeatedly tested after he married, as he was sold repeatedly to successive owners who lived farther and farther away from his wife, Ellen Turner, and their three children. Because Westly lived so far away, Mattie was only able to see her father on the weekends, and though she was only three years old at the time, father and children alike cherished the few times they had together. Mattie wrote that she could “well remember the little kindnesses my father used to bestow upon us, and the deep affection and

³⁰⁸ I do not mean to suggest that enslaved families were free from neglect and child abuse. The conditions of slavery might have made some parents yearn to protect their children, but Nell Irvin Painter suggests that it also could foster sexual, emotional and physical abuse. Nell Irvin Painter *Soul Murder and Slavery*, The Fifteenth Charles Edmondson Historical Lectures, Baylor University, April 5-6, 1993 (Waco, TX: Markham Press Fund, Baylor University Press, 1995)

³⁰⁹ Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 8; Lizzie Gibson expressed similar sentiments about the emotional blow of losing her mother. Born in 1852, Gibson spent most of her enslavement as a child, and she recalled that she “spent my happiest days of slavery in my childish days.” Gibson admitted that she “thought it was always to be just that way; but at the age of seven years that thought was changed, and a sorrowful change it was,” as she and her siblings were “taken from my mother.” Lizzie Gibson in John Blassingame *Slave Testimony* 738-739

³¹⁰ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 32-33

fondness he manifested for us.”³¹¹ Though rare, her times with her father were perhaps so memorable because they were infrequent, and because of the effort her father put into making those moments possible.

Westly’s last owner lived twenty miles away from Turner, Mattie and her siblings, but he allowed the abroad marriage to continue, which required Westly to walk twenty miles “every Saturday evening” and another twenty miles upon “returning on Sunday evening” in order to see his family. After a week of enduring taxing physical labor he subjected his body to still more work, all for the sake of his beloved wife and children.³¹² On a weekly basis Westly Jackson measured out his devotion to his wife and family in footsteps, and in doing so, modeled familial love and fidelity for his three children. It is important to remember that enslaved children didn’t just experience the division of their families; they also bore witness to the commitment of slaves to keeping families and communities together. In a world of uncertainties, in which a father could be repeatedly sold, the Jackson children saw nevertheless that it was possible to preserve love, and the diligence and dedication it took to do so.

The efforts of enslaved parents to make time for their families impressed upon their children the ways in which love could transcend slavery. As Wilma King points out, enslaved parents “were often too burdened by the duties of being laborers to indulge their

³¹¹ Like Mattie Jackson, Charles Ball also grew up with parents who had an away marriage that led him to see his father only on weekends. Ball recalled that his father was of “a gay, social temper, and when he came to see us on a Saturday night, he always brought us some little present” like “apples, melons, sweet potatoes” or “parched corn, which tasted better in our cabin, because he had brought it.” Charles Ball *Fifty Years in Chains; or, the Life of An American Slave* (New York: H. Dayton Publishers, 1859) 12; Mattie L. Jackson *The Story of Mattie L. Jackson; Her Parentage – Experiences of Eighteen Years in Slavery – Incidents During The War – Her Escape From Slavery, A True Story, Written and Arranged by Dr. L.S. Thompson (Formerly Mrs. Schuyler.) As Given by Mattie* William L. Andrews ed. From *Six Women’s Slave Narratives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 6-7

³¹² *ibid*, 6-7

children, yet many never stopped trying to foster positive relationships with them.”³¹³

Lunsford Lane hinted at how scarce his time with his mother was, remembering “My infancy was spent upon the floor, in a rough cradle, or sometimes in my mother’s arms.”³¹⁴ Because time was so rare the efforts enslaved parents made to steal away from work in order to be with their family often left lasting impressions on their children.

William Wells Brown recalled how his mother “had often ...told me how she had carried upon her back to the field when I was an infant – how often she had been whipped for leaving her work to nurse me – and how happy I would appear when she would take me in her arms.”³¹⁵ William was probably too young to remember the brief reunions between mother and infant, so it is likely that he could describe these moments because his mother had told him about her daily acts of loving rebellion. It was her way of letting him know just how much she loved him, and that though he may not recollect them, they had had happy times together.

Familial love and support could also provide children with the strength to endure the harsh realities of slavery. Lizzie Gibson, born in 1852, recalled that she was hired out for the first time when she was seven, in order to cover her master’s debts. Though this separated her from her mother and siblings, it “was not so grievous at first” because they were still able to “get together and talk to each other about it,” and dream together about all the “good things” they would “eat...when we got to our new home.”³¹⁶ Gibson’s remarks shed light on how families provided one another not only with emotional support, but with hope. Though their visits were brief, that time together was invaluable,

³¹³ Wilma King *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth Century America*, 18-19

³¹⁴ Lunsford Lane in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium*, 6

³¹⁵ Williams Wells Brown from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin’ On Ole Massa*, 187

³¹⁶ Lizzie Gibson in John Blassingame *Slave Testimony* 738-739

because her family was able to reunite occasionally and collectively imagine a better future, in which food was “good” and plentiful, and their home was their own.

While enslaved children were learning the power of familial bonds they were also learning important lessons about trust and honesty, inside and outside of the family. According to sociologist Niklas Luhmann, people learn how to trust from a young age, typically from their family members. Luhmann claimed that “In families...we learn not only trust but how to learn trust – how to generalize from a range of experience involving other selves who are free agents.”³¹⁷ Enslaved children received a variety of lessons about who to trust, but they were also deeply schooled in the practice of distrust. Many authors of slave narratives mentioned how they had been expressly told as children “not to steal” or develop “habits of untruth.”³¹⁸ Some enslaved children were taught by their masters and overseers that if they lied or stole, or were to “disobey their master... they would be sure to go to hell.”³¹⁹ Jacob Stroyer recalled how slaves’ parents were instrumental in educating children about deception and honesty. According to Stroyer parents in his community taught their children that “no matter how untrue a man might have been during his life” that before he died “he had to tell the truth and had to own everything he had ever done.”³²⁰ Enslaved children would have been well aware that death was a frequent and often sudden visitor, which made the warning against deceit all the more urgent and persuasive.

³¹⁷ Niklas Luhman, quoted in Trudy Govier *Social Trust and Human Communities* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997) 26

³¹⁸ Henry “Box” Brown *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown*, 17; James W.C. Pennington in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium*, 30

³¹⁹ Mr. Allen, who taught the “Sunday School” to “slaves’ children” like Henry Brown seemingly did not find it problematic to scare the slaves with stories of hell before telling them that “coloured people ...had no souls, and could not go to heaven.” Henry “Box” Brown *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown*, 37-38

³²⁰ Jacob Stroyer *My Life in the South* in *Five Slave Narratives*, 58

Of course, despite these injunctions against dishonesty, Calvin Schermerhorn points out that enslaved children "learned survival behavior in an environment that rewarded deception."³²¹ They may have been explicitly instructed to be truthful, but they also learned to be secretive and suspicious. First however, enslaved parents had to ascertain if their children could be trusted. In his work on performances in daily life Erving Goffman stressed the importance of interacting only with those "who can be trusted to perform properly." Because of this "children...are often excluded from performances...because often children can not be trusted to 'behave' themselves," or to understand the boundary between public and private information.³²² Harriet Jacobs' narrative reveals the care taken to insure that children were ready to be trusted with sensitive information. When Harriet Jacobs' daughter was about to be sent North Jacobs requested that she be able to leave her hiding place to see the girl before she left. Jacobs' grandmother was dubious, but "I told them I had watched her character and I felt sure she would not betray me."³²³ Her grandmother relented, and mother and daughter were able to spend several hours together. Before leaving Harriet made her daughter swear that her "secret would be safe" with Ellen, and the girl assured her "Mother, I will never tell."³²⁴

Harriet Jacob's children quickly absorbed the importance of keeping secrets. After Harriet's son Benny "accidentally" saw another runaway slave named Fanny in *her* mother's home, he mentioned it to his great-grandmother, who ordered the boy "never to speak of it, explaining to him the frightful consequences."³²⁵ Benny showed how well he

³²¹ Calvin Schermerhorn "Left Behind but Getting Ahead" *Antebellum Slavery's Orphans in the Chesapeake, 1820-60 Children in Slavery Through the Ages*, 217-218

³²² Erving Goffman *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959) 91

³²³ Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 115

³²⁴ *ibid*, 116

³²⁵ *ibid*, 123

had learned discretion after he realized that his fugitive mother was concealed in the attic of his great-grandmother's house. When Harriet Jacobs was about to leave by boat to go North herself, and spoke with her son for the first time in seven years she realized how long her son had known she was there, and how hard he had worked to protect the truth. Benny admitted that he once "heard somebody cough up over the wood shed," which made him suspect that his mother was hiding there. He grew even more convinced of this after hearing his sister sworn to secrecy about something, which he guessed was the presence of their mother. He never discussed the matter with his sister, "but after he heard the cough, if he saw her playing with other children on that side of the house," he would encourage them to play elsewhere, to keep them from hearing any sounds from Jacobs' hiding place. Once he became aware of the dangerous position they were all in, Benjamin kept watch for Dr. Flint and he grew nervous if he saw the slaveholder in the area, or talking to authorities. Jacobs recalled that he had often seemed to "manifest uneasiness, when people were on that side of the house," and now she knew his cautious behavior stemmed from his desire to keep his mother's hiding place a secret.³²⁶ Lest her reader think that her children were unique, or that they only learned to be so secretive because their mother was a runaway, Jacobs explained that his cagey behavior was in fact common, and vital. Jacobs explained that since enslaved people were "surrounded by mysteries, deception, and dangers," they "early learn to be suspicious and watchful, and prematurely cautious and cunning."³²⁷

Jacobs' narrative exhibited how learning "to be suspicious" could be a vital skill for enslaved children like her daughter Ellen. When Ellen moved North to live with her

³²⁶ *ibid*, 128

³²⁷ *ibid*, 128

white father's family, the Hobbs's, her freedom was far from secured. She was occasionally able to see her mother, who had since escaped North, but the rest of her time was spent working as a maid for the Hobbs's. When Ellen became convinced that a member of the family, Mr. Thorne was in contact with Dr. Flint about the whereabouts of her mother, Ellen began to closely watch the man. While she and the Hobbs children were outside one day, she watched as Thorne "tore up" a letter, and "scattered" the pieces on the ground. Because Ellen was "full of suspicions of him" she gathered the fragments and showed them to the Hobbs children, remarking "I wonder who Mr. Thorne has been writing to." When one of the children told her that it was none of her business Ellen responded that it was, for she feared he was writing to Dr. Flint about her mother's whereabouts. The children mocked her paranoia, but they assembled the letter. Once they had done so, they confirmed Ellen's suspicions; the letter did indeed reveal to Flint that Jacobs was in the area, and advised him that she could "be taken very easily, if you manage prudently." Ellen passed this information along to Jacobs, and in this way Ellen was able to use her suspicion to protect her mother.³²⁸

In inculcating the emotional norms and practices of slavery, parents and other enslaved adults not only taught enslaved children how to suppress emotions, they worked to help them anticipate the affective road that lay before them. This was especially clear in the ways that enslaved adults helped children adjust to the prospect of being sold. It was a harsh reality that children needed to be prepared for the fact that they might be the one sold away, given that they represented an increasing amount of interstate slave sales in the decades leading up to the Civil War. According to Susan O'Donovan, because of

³²⁸ *ibid*, 146

“their relatively low asking prices” and perceived liquidity, slaveholders throughout the South were “Paying their debts in black babies.”³²⁹

Enslaved parents found a number of ways to broach the subject of separation with their children. Perhaps little could truly prepare enslaved children for being separated from their loved ones, but that didn’t stop parents from trying. Henry “Box” Brown recalled that during his brief time with his mother “she would frequently give” him “lessons” about life, and the world around him. His mother “would take me upon her knee” and, gesturing to the surrounding trees left bare “by the winds of autumn,” and explain to him “as yonder leaves are stripped from off the trees of the forest, so are the children of the slaves swept away from them by the hands of cruel tyrants.” Whether or not his mother prepared him for separation with such beautifully illustrated parables he recalled these conversations with his mother lovingly, as some of the last “enjoyments of maternal feeling” that either was able to have together.³³⁰ Other parents tried to console their children through faith in religion, and the promise of reunion in heaven. Born in 1816, Tabb Gross explained that when he was about to be sold with his brothers at the age of fourteen his mother gathered her children to tell them that “they would perhaps never see her again in this world, but she trusted to meet them in heaven.”³³¹

A poem at the end of Lunsford Lane’s 1842 narrative entitled “The Slave Mother’s Address,” by “J.P.B” gave further insight into how the eve of sale was

³²⁹ Susan Eva O’Donovan “Traded Babies” *Enslaved Children in America’s Domestic Migration, 1820-60* (88-102) from *Children in Slavery Through the Ages* ed by Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, Joseph C. Miller (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2009) 89-90, 98; For more on the frequency of enslaved children being sold, see Calvin Schermerhorn “Left Behind but Getting Ahead”: Antebellum Slavery’s Orphans in the Chesapeake, 1820-60” also in *Children in Slavery Through the Ages* (2009)

³³⁰ Henry Brown *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown*, 16

³³¹ Tabb Gross and Lewis Smith in John Blassingame *Slave Testimony*, 346-347

idealized. The poem functioned as a cautionary tale from mother to child about anticipating loss, and navigating the emotional minefield that was slavery, saying:

“And if perchance some tender joy
Should bloom upon thy heart,
Another’s hand may enter there,
And tear it soon apart.
Thou art a little joy to me,
But soon thou may’st be sold.”

The poem implied that happiness was possible for enslaved children, but always in peril due to the threat of sale. It might instill fear in a child to know that sale was always imminent, but the words also sought to provide solace, through the comfort of having known a mother’s love. Of course, the poem was quite clear that if a child was sold it destroyed the “joy” of child and parent. The poem concluded, with the mother saying she would “gladly” see her child dead and buried “beneath the sod” in order to have her child be “Unmarr’d with grief,” and “free” in “spirit,” if not in body.³³² The poem from mother to child thus ended with a wish for the child’s death, hinting that if the mother’s child did, indeed, have their own “little ones” then they would understand these feelings. With the frame of being to a child, and the mention of that child being a “little joy” to their mother, it seemed that the poem was addressed first to a young child, before going on to speak to the child about what they would experience as an adult, as a spouse and as a parent. In this way the poem served as a collection of the different emotional lessons and challenges that an enslaved person would face over the course of their life.

Some relatives elected not to tell children when their sale was imminent.

Frederick Douglass lamented that when his separation from his grandmother was drawing

³³² Lunsford Lane in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium*, 55-56

nigh, she “kept the sad fact hidden from me.”³³³ Relatives who did so may have hoped to reduce enslaved children’s anxieties about an impending sale. Slave narratives contain many descriptions of the terror children experienced when they discovered that they were to be separated from their loved ones. When Frederick Douglass learned he was to be taken from his grandmother’s home when he grew old enough to work, he claimed that while he could not yet “comprehend the full import of the intelligence...a shade of disquiet rested upon me,” and he was “haunted” by “dread” of being sold.³³⁴ Though not old enough to completely understand the forces that would take him from his grandmother, he was left with an unshakeable fear. Lunsford Lane experienced this same “fear” when he learned that he “might be sold away from those who were dear to me,” and “sold south,” a feeling he likened to “having the heart wrenched from its socket.” Like Lizzie Gibson and Douglass, he could not shake the sense of foreboding: “Deep was this feeling, and it preyed upon my heart like a never-dying worm.”³³⁵ These heartrending passages suggest that even children who were thought to be too young to be aware of the possibility of sale were consumed by fear of it. The constant threat of separation and loss seems to have overwhelmed these children with wracking feelings of uncertainty and powerlessness, highlighting the importance of parental preparation and the armor of family bonds.

All too often deprived of parents or other loved ones through death or sale, enslaved children had an even more pressing need to learn how to navigate the affective relations and emotional rules of slavery, and they had to do so largely on their own. The

³³³ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 38

³³⁴ *ibid.*, 32-34

³³⁵ Similarly, Charles Ball recalled being sold away from his mother, claiming that “Young as I was, the horrors of that day sank deeply into my heart.” Charles Ball *Fifty Years in Chains; or, the Life of An American Slave* (1859) 11; Lunsford Lane in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium*, 8

ability to read and interpret the emotions of others was a crucial tool in this endeavor. As Trudier Harris argues in her study of African American writing about the South “Black people and Black characters had to become diviner, fortune tellers who must always read any situation correctly or suffer the consequences of not having done so.”³³⁶ This was a vital skill for enslaved children. Without the aid or affective guidance of parents, many enslaved children were forced to rely on their own abilities to read the feelings and character of those around them, and to act accordingly to those interpretations.

In the nineteenth century, scientists were already noticing the ways that children responded to the affective expressions of the people around them. In 1840 Charles Darwin began recording the behavior of his two month old baby, William or "Doddy." Darwin observed that after he sneezed his son would “frown, look frightened and cry rather badly,” a response that Darwin believed revealed that babies were born with “undefined instinctive fears." The naturalist asserted that William "studies expressions of those around him, especially if anything new is done before him." Research almost one hundred fifty years later would support this finding, showing that when in an “ambiguous” or uncertain situation babies look to the expression of “the adults around them” to establish how to respond: “If the adults look worried, babies are more likely to cry...than if adults look happy or unconcerned.” This process has been termed “social referencing.”³³⁷ According to Calvin Schermerhorn, "Enslaved children" in particular became schooled in this a sort of “social referencing,” navigating “interpersonal

³³⁶ See also Judy Dunn on the importance of learning to identify “the feelings and wishes of other people in their world” as part of the process of socialization. Judy Dunn “Understanding Feelings: The Early Stages” from *Making Sense: The Child’s Construction of the World* ed by Jerome Bruner and Helen Haste (New York: Methuen, 1987) 26-27; Trudier Harris *The Scary Mason-Dixon Line: African American Writers and the South* (Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 2009) 12

³³⁷ Ben S. Bradley *Visions of Infancy: A Critical Introduction to Child Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press with Basil Blackwell, 1989) 14-16

situations and honed abilities to judge character and reliability” in order to identify possible allies as well as possible threats. When they could not learn how to negotiate the emotional politics of slavery from their parents, they sought information “through observation.”³³⁸ By studying the emotions of the people around them children learned how to feel, what affective expressions were acceptable, and how to respond to the emotions of others, all of which helped them navigate a world in which they faced vast power differentials.

In describing his childhood in bondage, Frederick Douglass sheds light on how enslaved children read the faces of the people around them in order to negotiate complex affective relations and emotional events. For example, Douglass did not merely describe his grandmother as upset when she was separated from Douglass, he specifically wrote that his “Grandmamma looked sad,” and this expression was how he “knew she was unhappy.” Enslaved children may have learned how to interpret feelings by watching their loved ones, but even more importantly, they used these skills to read the emotions of members of the planter class.³³⁹ Frederick Douglass’s narratives provide a wealth of information about how children began to pick up on the emotions of their masters, and how they used this affective information strategically. As a child, Douglass not only monitored what his master *did*, he observed how his master *felt*, claiming that Colonel Lloyd “very early impressed me with the idea that he was an unhappy man. Even to my child’s eye, he wore a troubled, and at times, a haggard aspect” which “awakened my compassion.” Douglass emphasized just how “unhappy” he perceived Lloyd to be in his

³³⁸ Calvin Schermerhorn “Left Behind but Getting Ahead” *Antebellum Slavery’s Orphans in the Chesapeake, 1820-60 Children in Slavery Through the Ages* ed by Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, Joseph C. Miller (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2009) 205, 216

³³⁹ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 39

remark that he was supposedly able to feel “compassion” for the man who owned him and had subjected him to so much pain. His descriptions also suggested that Douglass had been closely observing the Lloyd’s behavior and character over time.

By watching his master, Douglass quickly gathered that Lloyd was prone to violent emotions, having “seen him in a tempest of passion” comprised of “all the bitter ingredients of pride, hatred, envy, jealousy, and the thirst for revenge,” and Douglass used this emotional information for self-preservation.³⁴⁰ Thus Douglass knew that whenever Lloyd’s “gestures were violent” that it was “wise to keep at a respectable distance from him,” for during these spells one “had only to be near him to catch punishment, deserved or undeserved.” Monitoring the man’s emotions helped him predict his future affective states, and to avoid their ramifications. Even when Lloyd displayed an “affectionate disposition,” as he was sometimes known to, Douglass remained wary, as he knew all too well that “the pleasant moods of a slaveholder are remarkably brittle...they neither come often, nor remain long.”³⁴¹ Douglass had only to look to his store of emotional information, gathered over time, to know that Lloyd’s “pleasant moods” were transient, and not to be trusted.

Douglass’s narratives also reveal situations when he incorrectly inferred how his master would affectively react. He recalled an incident when one of his enslaved cousins came to Capt. Anthony to tell him about the abuse she experienced at the hands of his overseer. Douglass “expected to see him boil over with rage” at his “brutal” overseer, but instead he responded to his slave with “an angry tone” that she had likely “deserved

³⁴⁰ *ibid*, 65

³⁴¹ *ibid*, 62

every bit of” abuse.³⁴² From observing interactions like this, he could correct misperceptions about how his master would respond, and better anticipate his master’s emotions and their impacts in the future. The event with his cousin suggests that from a young age slaves were involved in a constant process of trying to understand and interpret their master’s moods and psychological motives. Furthermore, this process had to begin anew each time a slave encountered a new master, or returned to an owner after a lengthy separation. Douglass explained how when he came back to Thomas Auld’s plantation, everything he knew about how Auld emotionally reacted in various situations had to be revised, as “All my lessons concerning his temper and disposition, and the best methods of pleasing him, were yet to be learnt.”³⁴³ Douglass would be forced into a position of uncertainty once more as he began once more to accrue the affective information that could provide him with a modicum of predictability, and protection from his master’s “temper.”

Of course, Douglass believed that his masters were blithely unaware that their slaves were watching and analyzing their emotions. Douglass claimed that Col. Lloyd would never have “thought that the little black urchins around him, could see, through those vocal crevices, the very secrets of his heart.”³⁴⁴ This suggests that though reading the emotions of one’s master could be a vitally useful skill, it was one that masters appeared oblivious to, according to Douglass. Perhaps masters like Lloyd could not believe the affective acuity of slaves, let alone enslaved children, or perhaps it was too sobering to contemplate being subject to that level of constant emotional scrutiny by one’s slaves.

³⁴² *ibid.*, 63

³⁴³ *ibid.*, 137

³⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 61-62

Harriet Jacobs' narrative reveals how much an enslaved child also gained affective information from observing how members of the planter class interacted with one another, and with enslaved people. Jacobs suggested that through these observations, slaves perceived the network of hate, jealousy, and fear that had especially explosive ramifications for enslaved girls. Jacobs explained that any enslaved child "who is accustomed to wait on her mistress and her children, will learn, before she is twelve years old, why it is that her mistress hates" certain slaves. Jacobs claimed that it was not unusual for a child to learn that their "own mother is among the hated ones." Over time, as "She listens to violent outbreaks of jealous passion," the enslaved child "cannot help understanding what is the cause." As a result Jacobs believed that the enslaved girl "will become prematurely knowing in evil things," and she will quickly "learn to tremble when she hears her master's footfall."³⁴⁵ This reveals the process of how enslaved children became aware of the complex dynamics of the emotional politics of slavery. Perceiving that her mistress "hated" certain female slaves not only educated Jacobs in the harsh and complex realities of sexual abuse within slavery, it shaped her own emotions. Guided by knowledge of the root cause of her mistress's hatred, she learned to fear "her master's footfall," which may or may not have helped her to avoid some sexual abuse herself.

Separated from their parents by work, hiring out, sale or death, enslaved children were forced to learn how to prepare for, or cope with, being alone. Some children gained experience by coping with loss when their parents had to leave them for work. Wilma King argues that "One of the most unsettling events in the lives of slaves was the early

³⁴⁵ Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 27

separation of mothers and children when the women returned to work.”³⁴⁶ These daily, forced estrangements often meant that children were left alone to deal with the intense emotions brought on by separation. As a boy, William Wells Brown “was a house servant” which he admitted was “preferable” to being “a field hand, as I was better fed, better clothed” and was able to wake up a half hour after the field workers. Though he was able to get another thirty minutes of sleep, his mother was not, and “Though the field was some distance from my house,” young Brown “could hear every crack of the whip, and every groan and cry of my poor mother.” Brown said that because of these sounds he “wept aloud” for he “found no consolation but in my tears.”³⁴⁷ The daily theft of his mother was doubly felt as he bemoaned her treatment, and had no one to provide him with solace. In the end he “found...consolation” in the unchecked expression of his grief. In an attempt to argue that the childhood of a slave was relatively free from worry or woe Frederick Douglass asserted that the enslaved child “cries but little, for nobody cares for his crying,” and “learns to esteem his bruises but slight, because others so esteem them.”³⁴⁸ While Douglass used this as proof that enslaved children were fairly content, it instead suggested that some enslaved children quickly absorbed how to temper their emotions, learning ways to quell their own tears and to suppress emotions that would go ignored. Unable to seek comfort from their parents, children like Brown and Douglass learned through necessity to control how they felt by self-soothing or by stifling their emotions.

³⁴⁶ According to King “In small households, individual childcare arrangements were made. Children sometimes accompanied parents to work. Ideally, domestic servants” were able to keep their children on hand as they worked. However on large plantations children often categorically “went to nurseries where their care was in the hands of slaves either too infirm, too old, or too young to work elsewhere.”³⁴⁶

Wilma King *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth Century America*, 13

³⁴⁷ William Wells Brown from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa*, 180-181

³⁴⁸ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 35

Through their discussions of the many losses and separations that enslaved children endured, slave narratives suggest that in navigating the emotional terrain of slavery many enslaved children experienced intense feelings that challenged their nascent coping abilities. Because of these conditions most enslaved children experienced a great deal of uncertainty, leading many to feel what Nell Irvin Painter claims is “‘soul murder’ which may be summed up as depression, lowered self-esteem, and anger.”³⁴⁹ A number of slave narratives suggest that these feelings of “terror” and “injustice” combined with physical and emotional deprivation led many enslaved children to experience intense bouts of depression. Even more so than his first autobiography, Frederick Douglass’s second narrative of his path through childhood was wrought with descriptions of his profound affective desperation. Douglass described how his feelings of loss began at a young age, poetically observing that “Thus early did clouds and shadows begin to fall upon my path.” As the narrative progressed, he articulated these stormy emotions more thoroughly, insinuating that the feelings intensified with age, and that as he “grew older and more thoughtful” he spent more time dwelling upon them. He recalled that:

“The cruelty of Aunt Katy, the hunger and cold I suffered...together with what I almost daily witnessed, led me, when yet but eight or nine years old, to wish I had never been born. I used to contrast my condition with the black-birds, in whose wild and sweet songs I fancied them so happy! Their apparent joy only deepened the shades of sorrow.”³⁵⁰

As he would throughout his second autobiography, Douglass lyrically invoked nature to convey his emotions. Many scholars have argued that Douglass, like so many authors of slave narratives, was heavily influenced by sentimental literature, which placed heavy

³⁴⁹ Nell Irvin Painter *Soul Murder and Slavery*, The Fifteenth Charles Edmondson Historical Lectures, Baylor University, April 5-6, 1993 (Waco, TX: Markham Press Fund, Baylor University Press, 1995) 7

³⁵⁰ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom* Edt. (2003 [1855]) 32-33, 100

emphasis on empathy and sorrow.³⁵¹ But in this passage Douglass was not only describing feelings of sadness, but also his profound anger and bitterness. The “black-birds” he saw may have made him feel “deepened...sorrow,” but only in contrast to their joy and “wild(ness),” which he seemed to envy. The “wish” that he “had never been born” was a tragic impulse, but also a violent one.

Other children responded to overwhelming sorrow and anger by acting on these violent impulses. When they were both quite young, Moses Grandy’s brother was sold to a man who was notorious for how he “very much ill treated many colored boys.” His brother was subjected to severe punishments: when some cattle were lost, his brother was flogged for it, and informed that he would be whipped each day until they were located. Perhaps unable to find them, and unwilling to face punishment once more at the hand of another, or perhaps out of willful defiance of his master, Grandy’s brother allegedly “piled up a heap of leaves, and laid himself down in them, and died there.” Grandy reported that his brother “was found through a flock of turkey buzzards hovering over him; these birds had pulled his eyes out.”³⁵² It is unclear how the story got back to Grandy, or how anyone could have known that Grandy’s brother intentionally “laid himself down” to die. Nevertheless, regardless of how Grandy learned about his brother’s fate, or whether his brother’s death was in fact a suicide, it is telling that Grandy believed it plausible that one so young could be distraught and determined enough to seemingly will themselves to die. Of course, if bondage could make young Douglass yearn to have

³⁵¹ See Sarah Meer “Autobiography, Authenticity and Nineteenth-Century Ideas of Race” Julia Swindells ed., *The Uses of Autobiography* (Bristol, PA: Taylor and Francis 1995) and William Andrews, ed., *Critical Essays on Frederick Douglass* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1991)

³⁵² Moses Grandy *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy, Late a Slave, in the United States of America*, in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968) 6

“never been born,” other enslaved children might also have felt that death was preferable to the emotional and physical brutality they endured.

Other children found less drastic ways to exert control over their lives. According to historian Calvin Schermerhorn, emotions served as both the means and ends, as the “pain and loss” enslaved people experienced “stimulated strategies for survival.”³⁵³ Enslaved children were taught how they might exercise control over their emotional lives, both to resist the affective and physical oppression of slavery, and to negotiate the conditions of their enslavement. This was done through a two-pronged campaign of seeking allies and attempting to emotionally influence the people around them. Calvin Schermerhorn claims that enslaved children were well versed in creating “strategies to recruit others who could care for them.”³⁵⁴ Enslaved children initially sought out fictive kin for protection, or “to cope with the theft of parents and other caregivers.” But these alternative “caregivers” could also provide a wealth of information about how to manipulate the emotional landscape of slavery, “how to appraise potential allies...how to endure physical pain and punishment” and “how to dissemble when necessary.”³⁵⁵ According to Wilma King, “Related or not” older enslaved people were crucial to helping young slaves navigate the relations and contestations of slavery.³⁵⁶

At a young age Frederick Douglass had already mapped out the affective terrain around him, ascertaining who would offer him kindness, and how to obtain this

³⁵³ Calvin Schermerhorn “Left Behind but Getting Ahead” *Antebellum Slavery’s Orphans in the Chesapeake, 1820-60*, 204

³⁵⁴ Similarly, childhood anthropologist Heather Montgomery asserted that “Children themselves take an active part in forming their families – some claim kin, others reject them.” Heather Montgomery *An Introduction to Childhood: Anthropological Perspectives on Children’s Lives* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) 132-133; Calvin Schermerhorn “Left Behind but Getting Ahead” *Antebellum Slavery’s Orphans in the Chesapeake, 1820-60*, 204

³⁵⁵ Calvin Schermerhorn “Left Behind but Getting Ahead” *Antebellum Slavery’s Orphans in the Chesapeake, 1820-60*, 219

³⁵⁶ Wilma King *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth Century America*, 14-15

advantage. Having been separated from his mother and grandmother Douglass knew all too well how crucial loving relationships were to surviving slavery. He saw the ability to forge emotional bonds as divine, claiming that “the germs of affection with which the Almighty...arms the helpless infant” were to be used to combat “the ills and vicissitudes” of slavery.³⁵⁷ Cast into the tumultuous world of the Lloyd plantation, Douglass “gradually” embraced new sources of support with “The little tendrils of affection, so rudely and treacherously broken” when he was taken from his grandmother’s home.³⁵⁸ He also learned that affective support could come from unlikely sources, as he found that even Aunt Katy, who had deprived him of food when he first arrived at the plantation, “was not destitute of maternal feeling.” Other “sympathizing old slaves” supplied him with extra food when they could, as well as “kind words,” “the comforting assurance that I should be a man some day,” and to “Never mind, honey – better day comin’.”³⁵⁹ They knew that to weather slavery a child needed emotional as well as physical succor.

Identifying fictive kin and “potential allies” helped children take control of their emotional lives and cope with loss, but in some ways the process also taught enslaved children the survival technique of inspiring affection in others. If slaveholding children were encouraged to develop affective ties with slaves to pave the way for paternalistic relations, enslaved children learned that the act of seeking affection from slaveholders often yielded advantages that helped them survive enslavement. Frederick Douglass frequently mentioned the benefits he was able to glean from his friendships with members of the planter class, but he also hinted that the bar was often quite low for what and whom young slaves viewed as “kind”. He recalled how much he enjoyed the

³⁵⁷ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 42

³⁵⁸ *ibid*, 51

³⁵⁹ *ibid*, 58

company of Edward Lloyd, who “was especially esteemed by the children,” for though he never “said anything to us or for us,” that was particularly “kind; it was enough for us, that he never looked nor acted scornfully toward us.” Douglass also described his mistress Lucretia Auld as “very kindly disposed toward me.” But he hinted that this affective inclination may have been relative, because “In a family where there was so much that was harsh, cold and indifferent, the slightest word or look of kindness” was cherished. In this context he accepted that Auld “pitied me, if she did not love me,” which reveals the extent to which enslaved children really needed sources of emotional support, even if it was in the form of pity.³⁶⁰ It is telling that such limited acts of “kindness” should be recalled so fondly. This suggests that Douglass shored up these few “kind” words, touches, or actions, in order to sustain himself, and perhaps view himself as lovable. Douglass would later observe that such “gentle” gestures helped “to convince him that though *motherless*, he was not *friendless*.”³⁶¹

Children like Douglass were also aware that endearing oneself to a member of the planter class might not only provide emotional support, there might be more tangible benefits as well. Douglass noted that in addition to the comforting “words and looks” he sometimes received from Lucretia Auld she also “sometimes gave me a piece of bread and butter.”³⁶² Similarly, Douglass claimed that his “connection with Master Daniel was of some advantage to me,” because the boy not only shared food with him, “was a sort of protector of me. He would not allow the older boys to impose upon me.”³⁶³ It is clear

³⁶⁰ *ibid*, 59-60, 97

³⁶¹ *ibid*, 106

³⁶² *ibid*, 97

³⁶³ Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, 36; In his second autobiography Douglass mentioned again how “Mas’ Daniel” had given him “cake,” but he also claimed that he “learned many things” from him. He doesn’t say what he was taught, but it is clear from this passage that forging an affective relationship with a slaveholder clearly had the potential to yield a variety

from his narratives that forging an affective relationship with a slaveholder had the potential to yield a variety of advantages for an enslaved child.³⁶⁴ Slaveholder Edward Pollard also wrote about how exchanges took place between himself and his enslaved friends. Pollard described the enslaved Tom as his “best friend,” noting that “I had a great boyish fondness for him, gave him coppers, stole biscuits for him from the table, bought him a primer and taught him to read.”³⁶⁵ The gift of extra food to a no doubt undernourished child, and of reading lessons to a person systemically denied a right to literacy were invaluable, and would not have been given without the “boyish fondness.”

For a child starved of affection as well as food, it might have been difficult to separate an affective caregiver from a food provider. Child psychologist Ben Bradley explains that it is common for children to display signifiers of affection to gain basic necessities, a practice he labels “cupboard love.”³⁶⁶ Of course, Douglass’s account of Daniel and Lucretia Lloyd and Pollard’s writing suggests that members of the planter class also conflated gifts of food with showing affection. Regardless of what Pollard and the Lloyds felt towards the children they gave “biscuits,” protection and “coins” to, slaves like Douglass learned that it was possible to convert slaveholder emotions into food and other “advantage(s).” It is also impossible to know how Tom felt about Pollard, or if Douglass genuinely saw Daniel Lloyd and Lucretia Auld as “friend(s),” but these

of advantages for an enslaved child. See more on his relationship with Daneil Lloyd in Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 83, 97

³⁶⁴ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom* (2003 [1855]) 83, 97

³⁶⁵ Edward A. Pollard *Black Diamonds Gathered in the Darkey Homes of the South*, 75

³⁶⁶ Child Psychologist Ben Bradley cites Freud’s influence “cupboard love,” the idea that nascent affective ties stemmed from a babies basic need “for food and comfort.” The concept also implies that though genuine love might later flourish as babies developed, that there was something less sincere about love linked to needs. Ben S. Bradley *Visions of Infancy*, 105

passages reveal how complicated and vital friendships between free and enslaved children could be.³⁶⁷

Fostering bonds of affection with slaveholders (deliberately or not) could provide benefits to enslaved children, but as Moses Grandy's narrative shows, there were also dangers. Grandy recalled how when he was quite young his family was torn apart by sale. Because his master's wife was attached to Moses she begged her husband "not to sell me," so the man sold Grandy's brother instead. Though her perceived connection with Moses prevented him from being sold, she did not care enough about his feelings to save his family.³⁶⁸ This suggests that enslaved children were forced to make a calculation in their relations with slaveholders, based on the knowledge that seeking short-term gains through affection might have far-reaching future impacts.

Children of the Antebellum South may have learned the importance of affective control from watching and interacting with the adults around them, but many of the lessons children learned about the emotional strictures of slavery came from other children. Children's psychologist Judith Rich Harris claims that children learn social norms best from other children because "In every society, acceptable behavior depends on whether you're a child or an adult, a male or a female. Children have yet to learn to behave like the other people in their social category."³⁶⁹ Who better to teach how to *be a child* than a fellow child? Once children of the Antebellum South had begun to absorb the affective norms of slavery from their parents and their own observations, they began to test what they learned in the social laboratory of play. Play helped the children of the

³⁶⁷ Douglass refers to Daniel Lloyd as "a friend" and describes Lucretia Auld as someone he "regarded her as my friend" in *My Bondage and My Freedom* (2003 [1855]) 83, 97

³⁶⁸ Moses Grandy *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy*, 6

³⁶⁹ Heather Montgomery *An Introduction to Childhood*, 126

Antebellum South learn and adapt to the emotional politics of slavery because it prepared them for their future roles and work, it helped them transgress social boundaries and it functioned as a source of comfort.

Enslaved children were subtly educated in the affective boundaries of slavery through the ways that play and work overlapped. According to Heather Montgomery studies have increasingly shown that for many children “the links between play, socialization, and work are extremely blurred.”³⁷⁰ This was especially true for children growing up in bondage. Sometimes the line between play and work was “blurred” when slave children played games that prepared them for the tasks that lay ahead, like setting the table and baking.³⁷¹ Other work educated them more in the social relations of slavery. Play and work became particularly intertwined and emotionally loaded for slave children like Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Keckley, Linda Brent and Sella Martin who were charged with being the slave of a particular child. Put in a position of caring for and waiting on a person close to their age, it could be difficult to separate friendship and duty. Sella Martin hinted at this complex relationship when he recalled how he used to “play” with “the son of my master, and whose attendant I was.”³⁷² As the “attendant” of someone of a similar age, at what point was it work to play? And what might this have taught enslaved children about their duties in their affective relations with slaveholders?

Feelings and power may have become even more convoluted when an enslaved child’s playmate was not only a member of the planter class, but their legal owner. Some slave narratives and wills hint at how slaveholding parents explicitly made their children the owners of their enslaved companions. Moses Grandy explained that born only two

³⁷⁰ *ibid*, 149

³⁷¹ Wilma King *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth Century America*, 14

³⁷² Sella Martin in *Slave Testimony* (1998) 706

days apart from his master's son, James Grandy, the boys were close from birth. Moses recalled how they "used to play together," and that James' father "always said he would give me to him" upon his death. Clearly Moses Grandy's master believed that his son's childhood attachment should be codified as ownership, and indeed, when the boys were only eight, James became Moses Grandy's master.³⁷³

Through play, children worked out their feelings about slavery and the hierarchies it imposed. In a 1934 interview Jeff Hamilton, a ninety-year-old man who was a former slave of General Sam Houston, recalled playing with Houston's daughter, "Miss Nancy." As a child Hamilton played a prank on her that he claimed "almost caused" her "to drown." Hamilton explained that Houston owned a "very spirited horse" that was known to become "enraged if anyone spit in his face." One day, when he was "feeling mischievous" Hamilton "told Miss Nancy to spit in the horses face. She did and the horse reared up on its hind legs and advanced towards her, snorting in anger." "Screaming," the girl "fell back in fright...into a deep part" of the nearby creek. Hamilton "scrambled into the creek and pulled her out," but not before "the family had rushed out to see what the trouble was." They did not see that Hamilton had saved her from the creek, only that he had endangered her life, and because of this, "Gen. Houston gave me a thrashing."³⁷⁴

Though Hamilton chalks his behavior up to "feeling mischievous" he deliberately tricked the daughter of his master into doing something that he knew would provoke a

³⁷³ A number of authors of slave narratives mention playing with the children who were or would become their masters. Henry Bibb recalled how as a child he lived Harriet White was "playmate when we were children" and also "the legitimate owner of my mother, and all her children." Linda Brent also became very attached to the child who legally owned her, a "Miss Flint" who "was endeared to me by many recollections." Parents also frequently assigned slaves to children in their wills. Moses Grandy *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy*, 6; Henry Bibb from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa*, 64-65; Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 76;

³⁷⁴ Interestingly, the article claimed that it was "a proud remembrance...that Jeff was the only Negro slave that Houston ever thrashed." A lot of emotions were wrapped up in this one event. Slavery Scrapbook 3L398 The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin

temperamental horse. At the very least, he knew the “very spirited horse” would scare Nancy, but he might have anticipated that the horse would react with physical violence. Whether he intended her harm or not, Hamilton pushed boundaries by placing a member of the planter class in danger. Within this loaded context his actions were not taken as “playful,” nor were their ramifications.

According to Montgomery, “Childhood” is “a time of play when children’s activities are consigned to the realm of the meaningless and carefree, bringing fun rather than a serious outcome.”³⁷⁵ But for children figuring out the borders of slavery and slaveholding, play could have serious consequences. The very real meanings and impacts that play could have were clear in an event from James Pennington’s childhood as a slave. Pennington recalled “an extremely cruel” overseer by the name of Blackstone who “always carried a long hickory whip.” One day Pennington chanced upon one of Blackstone’s “hickories lying in the yard, and supposing that he had thrown it away, I picked it up, and boy-like, was using it for a horse,” when the overseer found him absorbed in play. Blackstone proceeded to whip the young boy with another stick “most cruelly.” That day, Blackstone commenced a campaign of terror against the boy who had dared to play with his whip. Pennington explained that after the beating he “lived in constant dread” of the overseer, who “would show how much he delighted in cruelty by chasing me from my play with threats and imprecations.”³⁷⁶ When Pennington picked up the hickory stick to make-believe that it was a horse, riding through whatever unknown fantasy filled his imagination, the boy may not have intended his actions to be subversive, but it certainly angered the overseer. Because he had defied the overseer by playing with

³⁷⁵ Heather Montgomery *An Introduction to Childhood*, 141

³⁷⁶ James W. C. Pennington *The Former Blacksmith in Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium*, 3

a tool of discipline, the overseer set out to abuse the boy physically and emotionally. This left him in a state of “constant dread,” and insured that *all* play for Pennington would be undergirded by fear. Clearly the games played by slaves were not meaningless for members of the slaveocracy. Even at play, Pennington was policed.³⁷⁷

For enslaved children, play may have also served another affective role, as an outlet from slavery. Frederick Douglass described how “play and sports” often “took me from the corn and tobacco fields.... where scenes of cruelty were enacted and witnessed.”³⁷⁸ By removing him from the immediate “scene...of cruelty,” play offered Douglass temporary emotional and perhaps physical respite. Later, play would be used to help him adjust to his new home at Colonel Lloyd’s. Brought to the plantation to be separated from his grandmother, Douglass was suddenly surrounded by “a group of children of many colors.” Since he was “a new comer” Douglass “was an object of special interest” and the children “asked me to go out and play with them.” He declined at first, because he was hesitant to spend his last moments with his grandmother playing with strangers, but she insisted that he join them, reminding him that some were even

³⁷⁷ It is also notable that Pennington chose to imagine that the whip was a horse, rather than to pretend that he was an overseer with a whip. Because of cases like these, Heather Montgomery cautions against “seeing children’s play as simply imitative,” because doing so belies “the ways that children are creative and imaginative.” She brings up the example of Thomas Gregor’s work on the “role-playing” games of the Mehinaku of Amazonia, and how by playing “out scenes from real life,” but adding their own make-believe “elements,” Mehinaku children are simultaneously “incorporating adult activities into their own world and simultaneously mocking them.” Also, the fact that he was pretending does not mean he was *not* thinking about the larger society he occupied. Judy Dunn suggests that even when engaged in make-believe, children may be working through their understanding of the real world that surrounds them: “It is often suggested that the context of pretend play provides children with an opportunity to explore the social roles and rules of their world.” Heather Montgomery *An Introduction to Childhood*, 146-148; Judy Dunn “Understanding Feelings: The Early Stages” from *Making Sense: The Child’s Construction of the World* ed by Jerome Bruner and Helen Haste (New York: Methuen, 1987)32

³⁷⁸ Of course, these feelings could only be suppressed so much. Douglass suggests that even at play, but that slavery still influenced his feelings: “in all my sports and plays, and in spite of them, there would, occasionally, come the painful foreboding that ... I must soon be called away to the home of my master.” Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 37, 70

“kin to you.”³⁷⁹ Perhaps she knew that he would need to start acquainting himself with his extended family in order to find a new network of support once she departed. As it turns out, his fears were warranted, as his grandmother snuck away while he watched the other children play. Some of his siblings (whom he had only just met) and other children tried to comfort him, telling him “Don’t cry,” and giving him “peaches and pears,” though Douglass recalled that he was so distraught that he “flung them away and refused all their kindly advances.”³⁸⁰ The children recognized that he was upset by his grandmother’s departure, and it is quite possible that they had known all along that she was preparing to leave, and tried to distract him with play.

Though Douglass was disconsolate it is revealing that young children were so quick to identify and comfort a “heart-broken” child. Perhaps they knew all too well what he was feeling, if they too had been brought to Lloyd’s once they were deemed big enough to labor. Even if they had not been left themselves in this fashion, enslaved children were all too familiar with the inequalities and instabilities that characterized the world around them. In a society where children had little power or certainty, they sought to comfort Douglass with the few methods they had at their disposal, “kind” words, food and play. This highlights the extent to which play socialized slaveholding and enslaved children into the affective strictures and practices of the Antebellum South, and served as a staging ground in which to hone the emotional skills they would need as adults.

Some enslaved children even found some solace from the stifling oppression of slavery in the pleasure they were able to derive from their work. Elizabeth Keckely recalled how at the age of four years old, she was assigned her “first duty,” to take care of

³⁷⁹ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 39 - 40

³⁸⁰ *ibid*, 40

her mistress's baby, also named Elizabeth. Keckley, though young, embraced the work, describing the baby as her "earliest and fondest pet," and claiming that "it was pleasant to me" to be assigned to care for baby Elizabeth, "for the discharge of that duty transferred me from the rude cabin to the household of my master." Her mistress encouraged her to be a mindful attendant by promising Keckley "that if I would watch over the baby well, keep the flies off its face, and not let it cry, I should be its little maid." To Keckley, "This was a golden promise," and she swore that she required "no better inducement for the faithful performance of my task."³⁸¹ She seemed to genuinely enjoy caring for the child, describing the girl as her "fondest pet," but it is difficult to discern how much she liked caring for children, for that specific baby, or how much she wanted to be "transferred ... from the rude cabin" to the more comfortable master's house. Regardless, Keckley's actual feelings about the baby, her obligation to perform her duties as a caregiver, and the benefits she accrued from this job all became ineluctably intertwined.

Jacob Stoyer also succeeded at finding work that he enjoyed enough to endure hardship and become accomplished at his job. As a youth, Stoyer trained to serve as a jockey for his master, Col. Singleton, who was passionate about racing horses. Stoyer seemed to have derived a great deal of pleasure from his work, writing that he "loved the business and acquired the skill very early." Perhaps because of this love, Stoyer was a quick learner, and he was approved as an official rider under "the jockey laws of South Carolina... to be accepted as a capable rider." Stoyer seemed undeniably proud of this,

³⁸¹ Though she seemed enthusiastic about her work, at least at being removed from the slave quarters, she was ill-equipped to care for a child while she was still a child herself. Keckley recalled that one day she rocked the baby's cradle overzealously, and the baby fell out onto the floor. Keckley explained that "not knowing what to do, I seized the fire-shovel in my perplexity, and was trying to shovel up my tender charge, when my mistress" saw what Keckley was doing and "ordered that I be taken out and lashed for my carelessness." She may have been too young to know *not* to lick up a baby with a shovel, but she already associated tolls like shovels with doing work. Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes, Or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 19- 20

acknowledging the hard work it took and the physical abuse he faced, observing that he “passed through some very severe treatment before” passing the jockey test.³⁸² Stroyer was fortunate to find work that he both excelled at and found rewarding. The intensity of his enjoyment of racing shown through in his ability to profess his “love” for “the business” in spite of the “severe treatment” he faced in his path to becoming “a capable rider.”

During a grievous event in his childhood, Jacob Stroyer’s father consoled him by saying “Never mind, my son, you will be a man bye and bye.” His attempt to reassure his son that the sorrows of childhood would pass seems to have backfired, for Stroyer observed that “Though I was very small I thought that if, while a boy, my treatment was so severe, it would be much worse when I became a man.”³⁸³ Like countless other enslaved children, Stroyer had come to the realization that his parents could not shield their child as much as he had hoped, and that the onset of adulthood did not promise any more protection from fear or violence. In this way, his father’s words, meant to comfort, served instead to make Stroyer dread adulthood. For the majority of enslaved children, early realizations like this insured that they experienced a childhood that was abruptly abbreviated at best. But enslaved children also learned how to affectively adapt and cope. In childhood, through their interactions with adults and with other children, enslaved children would learn the importance of reading, performing, suppressing and inspiring emotions, and they honed the skills necessary to do so. They also bore witness to the power of emotions, and what sorrow, rage, love and jealousy could do. These

³⁸² Jacob Stroyer *My Life in the South in Five Slave Narratives*, 17-19

³⁸³ *ibid*, 25

techniques would prove crucial in weathering the daily interactions, conflicts and negotiations of slavery, and in affectively surviving and resisting the institution.

Chapter Four: "Breach of Confidence:" The Mechanics of Trust and Mistrust in the Antebellum South

Throughout her diary actress Fanny Kemble frequently pondered the subject of slaves and honesty, debating whether the enslaved people on her husband's plantations could be trusted or not. During her stay in Georgia Kemble spent a great deal of time with an enslaved man named Jack. Kemble recalled that one day she asked him how he would feel about being freed, to which "he stammered," and "hesitated" before protesting "Free, missis! What for me wish to be free? Oh no, missis, me no wish to be free, if massa only let me keep pig!" She interpreted this to mean that he was afraid of "offending" her by "admitting" that he wanted to be free or expressing even "the slightest discontent with his present situation." Instead she believed that he hoped to win her "favor," even if that required "strangling the intense natural longing" for freedom "that absolutely glowed in his every feature."³⁸⁴ Kemble clearly thought Jack was lying, vocally denying the "intense...longing" for liberty that his face could not conceal. But Kemble was not displeased by Jack's lie, rather she seemed touched that he would seemingly suppress the truth in order to appease her, and curry "favor." Jack may have "hesitated" to say how he felt on the subject of freedom, but he did not pause when hinting that he could be sated without manumission for the price of a pig. It's impossible to know how Jack felt about the prospect of liberty, or if he was deliberately trying to flatter his mistress with a performance of contentment and fidelity, but it is evident that Jack understood this conversation to be a negotiation of loyalty and trust.

³⁸⁴ Kemble went on to observe that the enslaved people at the plantation "once were, but no longer are, permitted to keep pigs." Frances Anne Kemble *Journal of a Residence On a Georgian Plantation In 1838-1839*, (Savannah: Beehive Foundation, Library of Georgia, 1992) 24-25

Regardless of whether or not Jack was genuine in his sentiments, he deftly turned a potentially contentious discussion into a bargaining opportunity. Though the request for a pig was seemingly unrelated, Jack was hinting at an implicit trade: his continued loyalty (feigned or not) in return for permission to keep livestock. Jack's quick response hints that slaves not only became adept at performing the role of trustworthy slave, they relied on scripts to navigate such interactions with slaveholders successfully. However, slaves like Jack knew that even performing loyalty was a gamble. Faithfulness might help a slave avoid punishments for disobedience, and sustained loyalty might earn a slave a pig, temporary favor, or even freedom. Or, a slave could easily gain nothing.

This interaction, and the way that Jack and Kemble responded, reveals a great deal about the affective negotiations that occurred between slaveholders and the enslaved around the issue of trust and sincerity. Though Kemble did not intend to test Jack's loyalty with her inquiry, it had that effect. Even though she questioned his honesty, she saw his deceit as an attempt to please her, which seemed to flatter her enough that he still succeeded at being seen as faithful, if not honest. However, other slaveholders would be less favorably inclined towards slaves they viewed as deceitful, and perhaps untrustworthy. This passage raises a number of questions about affective relations in the Antebellum South. The most important question is not why did slaveholders and slaves distrust each other, but how did trust ever flourish at all? How did trust and sincerity function in daily negotiations between slaveholders and slaves? What were the risks of trusting or not trusting, lying or telling the truth? What methods of fostering honesty or trust worked, and which did not? What was the value of trust in the Antebellum South, and how fungible was it?

The writings of former slaveholders and slaves alike are a litany of mutual mistrust and broken promises. Though trust was essential to the daily interactions of slavery, it was a nebulous process, constantly in flux. Sociologist Trudy Govier explains that since “the basis for trust is often slender, trust tends to be precarious.”³⁸⁵ When forged, it was usually temporary, threatened by betrayal, and often highly contingent on the space in which it was created. As a result of this instability, the mistrust between slaveholders and enslaved people persisted, and had far-reaching impacts on the social, legal and political landscape of the South.

Trudy Govier defines trust as a set of “expectations” that is “based on beliefs and feelings.”³⁸⁶ According to Govier, this includes the “expectation” that a person who is trusted will not exhibit “harmful behavior.” Of course, while one may trust someone enough to believe they are not a danger, Govier points out that trust inherently involves “an acceptance of risk and vulnerability.”³⁸⁷ This theory of trust begins to get at the root of why slaveholders and slaves were both so concerned with establishing or feigning trust: as a method of staving off injury, and fear of harm, even temporarily. Members of the planter class and enslaved people dealt with their anxieties about trustworthiness and sincerity through intense efforts to discern honesty and insure trust. Masters placed value on trust, so they sought ways to ascertain and reward trustworthiness, and punish deceit. Enslaved people attempted to negotiate and obtain the benefits associated with being trusted and loyal, even as they continued to mistrust their masters.

³⁸⁵ Trudy Govier *Social Trust and Human Communities* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997) 26

³⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 4

³⁸⁷ Govier is working off of W. Barnett Pearce definition of “trust as an assumption that another person will not harm us.” W. Barnett Pearce from “Trust in Interpersonal Communication” quoted in Trudy Govier *Social Trust and Human Communities*, 5-6, 16

The Antebellum period was an era that was greatly concerned with sincerity and authenticity. In an article in the planter's journal DeBow's about charlatan doctors the author, "Dr. D.," declared that "If anything marks the present age, it is the prevalence of imposture, and the very great readiness with which men and women, and sensible ones too, allow themselves to be beguiled." He argued that deceit was on the rise and chastised the public for what he viewed as excessive and unwarranted "credulity." Eventually he went on to focus on how the formerly "honorable" medical profession had "been infested by quackery and humbug," but the overarching argument of his essay was clear: in nineteenth century society there was much to be mistrustful of.³⁸⁸

In *Confidence Men and Painted Women* Karen Haltunnen argues that many middle class Americans in this era believed that increasingly "widespread hypocrisy" was a threat to the social fabric of the nation, and that if "deception became universally prevalent" then society would cease to "exist, much less flourish and be happy."³⁸⁹ So why were Americans in this period so consumed with anxiety about hypocrisy and "deception," and why was insincerity considered such "major social threat"? Haltunnen claims that because the majority of conduct manuals warning against such dishonesty were published in cities in the Northeast that these concerns stemmed from "a crisis of social identity" in an increasingly anonymous "urban social world."³⁹⁰ According to Haltunnen, residents of Northeastern cities developed a number of rituals and signifiers in order to navigate what was increasingly becoming what sociologist Lyn Lofland terms a

³⁸⁸ Dr. D. McCauley "Humbugiana" *De Bow's Review* May 1846, 1:5, 444-449

³⁸⁹ Karen Haltunnen *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830 - 1870*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982) 51

³⁹⁰ *Ibid*, xiii, xiv, xv, cv

“world of strangers.”³⁹¹ But as Dr. D’s essay would suggest, this was not just an urban Northern phenomenon that arose to address fears about dealing with strangers. I would argue that anxieties in this period about who was and was not genuine were not just based in an urban social crisis, but were pervasive, and laden with racial connotations.³⁹²

Though Southern slaveholders did not face the same issues of urban anonymity as Northern city-dwellers, they were concerned about the trustworthiness of the people around them, in particular, their slaves. The environment of mutual mistrust created by slavery insured that despite daily contact and the ineluctable intimacy bred by proximity slaves and slaveholders were, in many ways, operating in a “world of strangers.” According to Ariela Gross, “White Southerners were obsessed with the fear that slaves were deceiving them.” Eugene Genovese claims that they reacted to concerns of ineluctable deceit in a variety of ways, ranging from fear to amusement and even acceptance of “slaves’ congenital inability to tell the truth” as merely “mischievous.” Others suggest that slaveholders were less afraid of their slaves’ deceit than they were of what slaves who couldn’t be trusted might do. James Dorman argues that “Fear of revolt lay at the very heart of the relationship between slaves and masters, and was thus

³⁹¹ Karen Halttunen *Confidence Men and Painted Women* 35

³⁹² In addition to building on Halttunen’s work on questions of trust and sincerity in the nineteenth century, I will also rely on a number of sociologists who have done compelling work on how trust functions in society (or doesn’t.) In particular I will be using Trudy Govier’s *Social Trust and Human Communities*. Anne Warfield Rawls and Gary David’s article “Accountably Other” is also very important for this chapter, as they discuss not only how vital trust is to even the most basic of daily interactions, they articulate the mechanics of interactions to examine when trust succeeds, and when it breaks down. This is highly important for my understanding of how slaveholders and slaves are able to establish trust, even temporarily. However, the article doesn’t consider power differences or how group dynamics change sufficiently. Because of this, Erving Goffman’s work on trust and performance is also invaluable because he sees these quotidian interactions as having the ability to be asymmetrical. Originally written at the height of Cold War-induced paranoia, Goffman’s concerns with “trustworthiness” make him useful for discussing the crisis of sincerity taking place in the Antebellum period. Karen Halttunen *Confidence Men and Painted Women*; Trudy Govier *Social Trust and Human Communities*; Anne Warfield Rawls and Gary David “Accountably Other”; Erving Goffman *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959) 1

fundamental to the creation of distrust by whites.”³⁹³ Thus for masters, in the debate over whether slaves could be trusted or not, there was no less at stake than their lives. While these scholars discuss white anxieties about dishonest slaves, and why enslaved people would employ deceit strategically, they do not address how trust was established between slaveholders and slaves, even if only temporarily and tenuously.

Concerns about the sincerity and honesty of enslaved people gave rise to debates amongst slaveholders about whether or not slaves were inherently and intentionally deceitful or not. In her diary, Fanny Kemble devoted a great deal of attention to this question. The frequent discussions of slaves’ honesty suggest that not only was this a popular topic for members of the planter class, it was also a subject of some interest to Kemble. Everyone around her seemingly had an opinion on the matter. One neighbor argued that slaves were very similar to “the Irish,” citing the shared propensity to “lying and pilfering...of both peoples.”³⁹⁴ During a visit to another neighbor, Kemble recalled that they debated “the credibility of any negro assertion,” with some positing that “No negro was to be believed on any occasion or any subject.”³⁹⁵ Kemble’s own husband, Pierce Butler, declared that “it was impossible to believe any word” that enslaved people

³⁹³ For more discussions of the slaveholder perception that slaves were inherent liars see Kenneth M. Stampp *Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989) Chapter 3; Lawrence Levine “The Slave as Trickster” in *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) Thomas D. Morris, *Southern Slavery and the Law, 1619-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) Chapter 12; Ariela J. Gross, *Double Character: Slavery and Mastery in the Antebellum Southern Courtroom* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2006) 66; Eugene D. Genovese *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976) 608, 609, 612; James H. Dormon, “The Persistent Specter: Slave Rebellion in Territorial Louisiana” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, 18-4, 404

³⁹⁴ For another discussion of the Irish as inherent liars see *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War* ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) 56; Frances Anne Kemble *Journal of a Residence On a Georgian Plantation In 1838-1839*, 154

³⁹⁵ Frances Anne Kemble *Journal of a Residence On a Georgian Plantation In 1838-1839*, 60

uttered.³⁹⁶ The fact that he believed slaves to be incapable of honesty, and the impact this had on plantation policy about expectant and nursing mothers, would become a source of tension between Butler, Kemble, and the plantation's overseer.

As Kemble found, the belief that slaves were not credible not only created a climate of suspicion on many plantations, it could be a matter of life and death. In an article in *De Bow's Review* Dr. McTyeire addressed the subject of whether to call a doctor when a slave was ill, advising readers to "Guard...against feigned sickness," as though this were a common phenomenon.³⁹⁷ Because of the prevalence of the idea that slaves' physical self-assessments could not be believed Henry Bibb claimed that slaves were given "very little attention" when they were sick. Bibb attributed this to his master's belief that any slave who claimed they were ill was "a liar and a hypocrite...and he only wanted to keep from work."³⁹⁸ Fanny Kemble encountered this perception repeatedly when, on behalf of some women on her husband's plantation, she tried to "lessen" the workload required of enslaved women while they were pregnant, and recuperating from giving birth. Kemble brought the issue to the overseer, but he told her that the enslaved women on the plantation were faking pregnancy, "constantly...*shamming* themselves in the family-way" in the hopes of shirking their work.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁶ Frances Anne Kemble *Journal of a Residence On a Georgian Plantation In 1838-1839*, 25

³⁹⁷ D. B. De Bow [The Editor], H. N. McTyeire "Plantation Life—Duties and Responsibilities," *DeBow's Review* 29-3 (September 1860) 363

³⁹⁸ The subject of slaves feigning health or illness also led to a number of legal battles. Slave owners besieged the courts of the Antebellum South claiming that they had been sold slaves who appeared "sound" of body and mind, only to have them grow ill or die. Some plaintiffs blamed the slave traders who had sold the unsound slave, while others accused doctors of chicanery. In the 1833 case of *Shellman v. Scott* a Georgia court determined that several slaves had "feigned" "derangement," which "greatly reduce(d) their value." *Shellman v. Scott*, R.M.C. 380, May 1833 (Georgia) In Helen Tunncliff Catterall ed. *Judicial Cases concerning American Slavery and the Negro: Volume III Cases from the Courts of Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968 (1926)) 14 For another case in which slaves were accused of faking illness, see *State v. Abram, (a slave)*, 10 Ala. 928. January 1847; Henry Bibb from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa*, 122

³⁹⁹ Frances Anne Kemble *Journal of a Residence On a Georgian Plantation In 1838-1839*, 72

The stereotype that enslaved people lied about their health to avoid work was so enduring that slaves were even thought to feign death, a practice referred to as “playing possum,” or “possuming.”⁴⁰⁰ Sella Martin recalled the story of a slave named Flanders, whose master, Terry, one day ordered that the enslaved man be hung up in the smokehouse and given over “four hundred...lashes.” Terry continued to whip Flanders long after he appeared to be unconscious, and when another slave noticed that Flanders was not responding he told the slaveholder that Flanders might be dead, or “dying.” Terry insistently beat Flanders, “accusing him at the same time of ‘playing possum’ – that is, feigning insensibility.” Eventually the slave owner realized that Flanders had stopped moving, at which point “he took out his knife, and stuck it in the foot of his victim two or three times.” When Flanders still did not respond, the slaveholder finally pronounced Flanders dead.⁴⁰¹ This scene was both a testament to the brutality of slavery, and proof of how little slaveholders trusted their slaves. Terry not only disregarded the slave who claimed that Flanders was “dying,” he ignored all signs that he was flogging a dead man, so convinced was he that slaves could not be believed on any subject.

The perception that slaves were inherent liars may have stemmed from the Common Law origins of the criminal system of the Antebellum South, which denied slaves the right to testify. According to Thomas D. Morris, in crafting American law many states looked to the common law of England as a template, and in England slaves could not “testify at all because they could take no oath in an English court.” Over time

⁴⁰⁰ In *Jordan v. State*, 22 Ga. 545, June 1857 a slave was accused of “possuming.” For another example of a dead slave being accused of “playing possum” see William Wells Brown from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa*, 200-201.

⁴⁰¹ Sella Martin in John Blassingame *Slave Testimony* (1998) 717-718

the prohibition was extended to all people of African descent, regardless of free status.⁴⁰² For slaves like Moses Grandy this meant that “the evidence of a black man, or of ever so many black men, stands for nothing against that of one white.” As a result, he bemoaned that a white person could do anything “against a black one, if he only takes care that no other white man can give evidence against him.”⁴⁰³ Some slave narratives pointed out the folly of such a law, claiming that not allowing slaves to testify enabled many criminals to go free. Jacob Stroyer recounted the tale of an infamously cruel “slave hunter” who was suspected of killing some fugitives, but the only people who had seen proof of his crimes were slaves. As a result, the man wasn’t brought to justice until a white individual who suspected him of murder befriended him, and wheedled a confession from him.⁴⁰⁴ Through this anecdote Stroyer subtly pointed out that any number of crimes might go unprosecuted because slaves were not considered trustworthy in a court of law.

In spite of this, some slaveholders seemed to believe that slaves could be trusted about some subjects more than others. While many members of the planter class argued that slaves were prone to lying and theft, other masters argued that slaves typically only stole food, and thus only robbed “masters who underfed their slaves.”⁴⁰⁵ The idea that

⁴⁰² Some court cases from this period show that some judges even rejected the testimony of slaves about other enslaved people. For example, see *Johnson v. Lovett*, 31 Ga. 187, August 1860 from Helen Tunnicliff Catterall *Judicial Cases*. Documents indicate that slaveholders occasionally tried to use a slave’s testimony in court, to no avail. Clearly it didn’t always benefit members of the planter class to delegitimize the word of slaves. For example see *Thorpe v. Burroughs*, 31 Ala. 159, June 1857; *Heath v. State*, 34 Ala. 250, June 1859. [251]; Thomas D. Morris, *Southern Slavery and the Law, 1619-1860*, 269-270

⁴⁰³ For more on the fact that enslaved people were unable to testify in court see Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (New York: Barnes and Noble Classics) 34; Moses Grandy in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968) 37

⁴⁰⁴ Jacob Stroyer in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968) 72-75

⁴⁰⁵ Eugene D. Genovese *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* 599-600, 603 (See chapter “Roast Pig is a Wonderful Delicacy” in particular.) For more on perception that slaves were thieves see Gwendolyn Midlo Hall *Social Control in Slave Plantation Societies, A Comparison of St. Domingue and Cuba* (Johns Hopkins Press: Baltimore, 1971)

slaves stole food but little else was prevalent enough that one Maryland slaveholder declared that he “would trust a nigger with my money a great deal sooner than I would with cows and hogs.”⁴⁰⁶ Indeed, for all the assertions that enslaved people were dishonest, and stole food, a number of slave narratives included incidents in which slaves were entrusted with money or valuable property.⁴⁰⁷

Though Fanny Kemble would frequently remark that slaves were “habitual liars,” she differed from her neighbors in her explanation of how and why slaves lied, arguing that their lying stemmed more from the social conditions of slavery “than from any natural tendency to untruth.”⁴⁰⁸ She also asserted that slaves could not be deliberately untruthful as they were unable to differentiate “between truth and falsehood.”⁴⁰⁹ Perhaps because of this, Kemble often wrote about how poorly slaves lied. She recalled that a kitchen slave was accused of having stolen some meat, and Kemble had “no doubt” that the slave had done it, because “the very lies he told about it were so curiously shallow, child-like, and transparent, that ...they confirmed the fact of his theft quite as much, if not more, than an absolute confession would have done.”⁴¹⁰ This scene suggested equally that Kemble thought she excelled at reading the sincerity of enslaved people, and that she was convinced that slaves could not intentionally lie. This was also highlighted when she wrote that she believed her slaves’ account of life under the previous overseers, claiming:

⁴⁰⁶ Jacob Stroyer in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium*, 26

⁴⁰⁷ James Pennington would reproach his former masters by highlighting his honesty with money. In a harsh letter to the Maryland man who once owned him Pennington wrote that he had “acted with fidelity in any matter which you entrusted me,” reminding the slaveholder that he had often “saw fit to entrust me with considerable money...not a cent” of which “was ever coveted or kept.” James W.C. Pennington in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium*, 79-80; See also Josiah Henson *The life of Josiah Henson: formerly a slave, now an inhabitant of Canada*, 1849, 21

⁴⁰⁸ Frances Anne Kemble *Journal of a Residence On a Georgian Plantation*, 60

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 143

⁴¹⁰ Interestingly, the slave’s “transparent” lies provoked very different responses in Kemble and her husband. What she deemed poor attempts at concealing the truth “provoked at once my pity and my irrepressible mirth,” while it filled her husband with “anger and indignation” and “the unhappy cook” was whipped for the offence. *Ibid*, 81

“let the propensity to lying of the poor wretched slaves be what it will, they could not invent, with a common consent, the things that they one and all tell me” about the cruelty of the former overseers.⁴¹¹ If slaves could not deliberately lie on their own, she suggested, then they were also incapable of creating and sustaining a collective lie.

Despite the popular notion that slaves were inherently deceitful, even at the brink of death, a number of proslavery texts contained impassioned defenses of slaves’ honesty and trustworthiness. Many slaveholders provided convoluted or condescending reasons why slaves couldn’t or didn’t lie, seemingly in an attempt to assuage their concerns about the veracity and sincerity of enslaved people. Slavery advocate Thomas Roderick Dew declared that he had “often heard slaveholders affirm that they would sooner rely upon their slaves’ fidelity and attachment” during a “severe trial than on any other equal number of individuals.”⁴¹² William Harper weighed in on the subject in his own pro-slavery essay, claiming that he had “never heard or observed, that slaves have any peculiar proclivity to falsehood,” and that he had never known a slave to lie “for a malicious purpose.” Instead he argued that slaves usually lied to protect “a fellow slave,” an act he applauded, claiming that in such cases even deception “bears some semblance of fidelity.” Harper went so far as to posit that if a slave lied it was “perhaps” because the “truth could not be told without breach of confidence.”⁴¹³

⁴¹¹ Ibid, 124-125

⁴¹² Of course, not all supporters of slavery felt this way. When Ellen Craft, disguised as a male slaveholder, got into a discussion of her supposed slave’s trustworthiness, she told him she had “great confidence in his fidelity.” The slave dealer responded “Fidevil...It always makes me mad to hear a man talking about fidelity in niggers. There isn’t a d____d one on ‘em who wouldn’t cut sticks, if he had half a chance.” William Craft *Running a Thousand Miles For Freedom; or, the Escape of William and Ellen Craft From Slavery* (Salem, New Hampshire: Ayer Company, Publishers, Inc., 1991) 47-48; Thomas Roderick Dew “Professor Dew on Slavery,” *The Pro-Slavery Argument*, 458

⁴¹³ William Harper “Harper’s Memoir on Slavery” *The Pro-Slavery Argument*, 39-40

Harper was so intent on defending the trustworthiness of slaves (and of the institution as a whole) that he swore slaves' lies to be infrequent, rooted in "fidelity" and a desire to protect their masters' secrets. He was clearly invested in the idea that slaves could be trusted, or at least that they were not maliciously deceitful. Harper didn't just defend the honesty of enslaved people, he bemoaned the fact that slaves were seen as untrustworthy at all. He observed that "even if" a slave harbored "no feelings or designs" of deceit "they will be attributed to him by the master," and as a result slaves would be viewed with suspicion. Not only did Harper assert that enslaved people *were* trustworthy, he argued that believing slaves to be deceitful was nothing more than the figment of a slaveholder's conspiratorial imagination. Harper opined that if these imaginings weren't allowed to run rampant, fostering "distrust and aversion," then "confidence and good will" could flourish between trusting slaveholder and trusted slave.⁴¹⁴

Closely related to the idea that slaves were trustworthy was the claim that slaves were inherently loyal. William Harper opined that "in general" slaves' "fidelity to their masters is not to be shaken," especially when they had "confidence" in their master.⁴¹⁵ Clearly Harper saw trust as shared, and mutually reinforcing; a slave who had "confidence" in their owners could then be trusted to be unerringly faithful. (Harper did not entertain the notion that enslaved people might not trust those who owned them.) Many proslavery authors discussed enslaved people's capacity for loyalty, and wrote effusively about slaves who had provided a lifetime of faithful service. James Henry Hammond penned a lengthy homage to the slave who is loyal from "cradle" to grave

⁴¹⁴ William Harper "Harper's Memoir on Slavery" *The Pro-Slavery Argument*, 94

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid*, 81

(their master's or their own, whichever came first).⁴¹⁶ George Sawyer sang the praises of a slave named Jack who "had lived to see three generations" of children born to his master's family, and they held him in high esteem because he was "faithful" and "devoted."⁴¹⁷ Of course, Sawyer was quick to point out that the "common" trait of slaves having "remarkable fidelity...to their masters," was not rooted in "any high intellectual and refined sentiment of gratitude," but was rather an "instinctive impulse," no greater than the faithfulness exhibited "by some of the canine species."⁴¹⁸

Those who clung tightly to the idea that enslaved people were loyal and true even found a way to explain slaves' untrustworthy acts: attributing them to Northerners. Harriet Jacobs recalled that when her brother William visited the Northeast and Canada with Mr. Sands, Sands commended William for being "a most faithful servant," remarking that "abolitionists had tried to decoy him away," in vain. In spite of this praise a letter arrived shortly after announcing that the abolitionists had "succeeded." Sands expressed shock that William had escaped, declaring that he had "trusted him as if he were my own brother," so he did not believe that the "abolitionists...could tempt him."⁴¹⁹ Sands clearly refused to believe that William would leave of his own volition, and instead placed the blame on the supposedly duplicitous abolitionists. Other members of the planter class feared that Northerners were not only trying to "decoy" contented slaves

⁴¹⁶ James Henry Hammond "Hammond's Letters on Slavery," *The Pro-Slavery Argument*, 161

⁴¹⁷ George S. Sawyer *Southern Institutes* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1858) 225-226

⁴¹⁸ Sawyer also claimed that slaves were "generally extremely credulous and confiding... and easily duped by their superiors." This suggested that slaves were not only trustworthy they were *trusting*. An Alabama court case accusing a person of easily "Inveigling...and enticing away a slave" shows that the belief that slaves were overly trusting was widespread, and legally actionable. *Spencer v. State*, 20 Ala. 24, January 1852; George S. Sawyer *Southern Institutes*, 197, 199

⁴¹⁹ Notably, Sands also felt the need to highlight how intensely *he* had "trusted" William, even if William clearly could not be trusted himself, and did not trust his master's promises to free him. Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 110-112; For more on the idea that abolitionists tricked slaves in to running away see the case *Mangham v. Cox and Waring*, 29 Ala. 81, June 1856, in which the judge referenced "the known disposition of at least a portion of abolitionists...to delude" slaves into "escaping."

into running away; they were plotting with enslaved people in the South. In his 1860 work on the “Social Relations” of the Antebellum South, Daniel Hundley claimed that poor or non-slaveholding whites, whom he termed “Southern Bullies,” as well as Northerners, were in league with slaves for a variety of nefarious purposes. Hundley warned that the “Southern Bully” and the “Yankee” tried “to intrigue with the slaves” in order “to worm out family secrets,” and to identify the “villainous, and discontented of the negro men.”⁴²⁰ Proslavery author Edward Pollard avowed that “there are a number of Yankee doughfaces... in the South,” who, in the presence of pro-slavery Southerners pretended to be “the greatest admirers of the *peculiar institution*, and, to honey-fuggle us,” even vocally critiqued the North. But beyond their two-faced hypocrisy Pollard claimed that they were a “Danger” and “not to be trusted” because they were really “tampering with the slaves” and “libeling the South” at every “secret opportunit(y).”⁴²¹

Claims that slaves never told “malicious” lies, that they only stole food, or were driven to deceit by Abolitionists, didn’t necessarily contradict the idea that slaves were liars and thieves. Even some staunch defenders of the loyalty of slaves conceded this point. Rather such arguments that slaves were nevertheless loyal, or that their lies and thefts were harmless, reveal how very badly slaveholders wanted to have some trust in their slaves.

⁴²⁰ Daniel R. Hundley *Social Relations in Our Southern States*, 231

⁴²¹ According to Pollard Northerners were not only intent on lying to Southerners and beguiling slaves, they generally lacked sincere emotions. Pollard explained how there was one slave on his plantation named George would ask visitors “to ‘remember’ him” at which point people would give him “half-a-dollar.” Pollard recalled how one visitor, “from the North” who was a supposed “friend of humanity” (i.e. an abolitionist) was “heartless to his appeal” for money. Pollard claimed that the Northerner told George “‘Oh yes...I will not forget you... I will think of you, and hope you will be elevated into a better condition.’ But he never gave him a dime to be elevated with.” Pollard clearly believed that this incident illustrated that an anti-slavery Northerner was not only less generous than most Southern members of the planter class, but insincere and even “heartless.” Edward A. Pollard *Black Diamonds*, 19, 31-32

While proslavery advocates and slaveholders debated whether slaves were inherently deceitful or incapable of lying, the writings of former slaves suggest that the consensus among most enslaved people was that slaveholders, and most white people in general, were liars and hypocrites. Harriet Jacobs observed that “Slaveholders pride themselves upon being honorable men; but if you were to hear the enormous lies they tell their slaves, you would have small respect for their veracity.”⁴²² Many slave narratives reveal that enslaved people were not only wary of members of the planter class, but of white people in general. Harriet Jacobs recalled that a white ship’s captain who helped her escape from slavery seemed upset that she “had so little confidence in him” after all he had done for her. Jacobs remarked, “Ah, if he had ever been a slave he would have known how difficult it was to trust a white man.”⁴²³ This mistrust ran so deep that even seemingly sympathetic white people were to be viewed with suspicion. While hired out to a shipyard Douglass encountered two Irishmen, who he recalled “advised me to run away to the north; that I should find friends there, and ...be free.” Afraid that the men “might be treacherous” Douglass “pretended” he did not “understand them.” Douglass defended his skeptical response, explaining that “White men have been known to encourage slaves to escape” only to then “catch them...to get the reward,” and Douglass feared that the

⁴²² For more on former slaves who describe their masters as hypocritical see Henry Bibb from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1969) 69, 118 and Henry “Box” Brown “Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown” written by himself, introduction by Richard Newman, Foreword by Henry Louis Gates, Jr (New York, (Oxford University Press, 2002) 37-41; Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 39

⁴²³ Jacobs’ observation delineates the sexual politics of this conflict around trust. After her experiences with Dr. Flint it is little wonder that she noted that slavery had left her with a distrust of white *men*. Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 131

Irish workers, though “seemingly good men” planned to do the same.⁴²⁴ Whether or not these two men planned to trick Douglass in this manner, other whites had clearly realized that they stood to gain financially by convincing slaves to run away. However, based off of tales of what “White men have been known to” do, enslaved people like Douglass learned to be wary of whites that spoke of freedom.⁴²⁵

A passage from Sella Martin’s narrative of his time in bondage sheds light on how promises between slaveholder and slaves were negotiated, and how the process of trust could break down. After being abruptly separated from his family years before, Sella Martin learned from a passing man of color that his mother was alive, though not well, and living only sixty miles away. Martin recalled that when he begged permission to visit her his master initially “seemed glad” that Martin had learned of his mother’s whereabouts, and “promised in the genuineness of his joy to take me himself...shortly.” However, after a while “he got cool on the subject,” realizing “how sentimental, and therefore how silly, to slaveholders, it would appear” to travel that distance for no reason other than “to take a slave-boy to see a slave-woman.” He tried to discourage Martin

⁴²⁴ William Craft was given similar council as he traveled North with his wife, Ellen, who was dressed as a white, male slaveholder. Not too far from Philadelphia a white guard from the train told William “When you get to Philadelphia, run away and leave that cripple, and have your liberty.” William, clearly mistrusting the man’s intentions, replied that he would “never run away from such a good master as I have at present.” Even when people offered sympathy, and seemed opposed to his status in bondage, William maintained his performance of loyalty, scared, it would seem, that it was a trap. This skepticism dissipated when William encountered a free man of color on the train, who told William about “a boarding house that was kept by an abolitionist, where he thought I would be quite safe, if I wished to run away from my master. I thanked him kindly.” Notably, when a man of color broached the subject, rather than profess his loyalty to his master, and his unwillingness to run, William thanked the man, implying that he might want to run, or at least was not opposed to the idea. William Craft *Running a Thousand Miles For Freedom; or, the Escape of William and Ellen Craft From Slavery*, pp. 77-78; For more on distrusting whites who profess their opposition to slavery see Henry Bibb from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin’ On Ole Massa* (1969) 85; Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, 47

⁴²⁵ For other examples of enslaved people learning that they can’t trust poor white people in particular see Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (New York: Barnes and Noble Classics) 47; Jacob Stroyer in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) 26; James W.C. Pennington in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) 58-59; Mattie Jackson from William L. Andrews ed. *Six Women’s Slave Narratives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 5-6

from making the trip, finally telling Martin that “he could not go, and that he would not trust me to go alone.”⁴²⁶ Whether he ever intended to take Martin to see his mother or not, Martin’s owner at least saw reasons to reassure Martin that he would see his mother again. Martin seemed to believe that his master *had* planned on taking him to see his mother, but that his mind was changed when he believed it might be taken as an inappropriate affective response to a slave’s request, seen by other slaveholders as “sentimental” or “silly.” His feelings of peer-pressure might indicate that he realized this was not an acceptable bargain to strike with slave, even one who was viewed as loyal.

Interestingly, Martin’s narrative framed the event charitably, writing that he was “sure” that his master did not change his mind due to a “want of feeling,” as his master had promised Martin that he would consider “buying my mother” even though he had “no desire to buy a slave.”⁴²⁷ Martin was perhaps giving his former master the benefit of the doubt, or trying to appear forgiving in his narrative. Or perhaps Martin genuinely believed that his master had, at one time, entertained the idea of buying Martin’s mother. It is possible his master *had* contemplated reuniting the two in some way, but it is also incredibly likely that his master’s “maybe” was always intended as a “no.”

As Martin’s story shows it was not unusual for planters to make promises to their slaves that were never realized. One of the promises that planters typically made to their slaves, and then broke, was that their families would be kept together, that their children or spouses would not be sold. Henry “Box” Brown master “promised faithfully” not to sell Brown’s wife, and pretended to entertain an extreme horror of separating families,” and because of his “apparent sincerity” they believed him. But after barely a year of

⁴²⁶ Sella Martin in John Blassingame *Slave Testimony* (1998) 712-713

⁴²⁷ *Ibid*, 712-713

marriage “his conscientious scruples vanished” and his wife was sold.⁴²⁸ Similarly, Moses Grandy recalled how as a child his intemperate master had to sell many slaves to cover his debts, but he swore he would never sell Grandy’s mother and her eight surviving children, a vow he did not keep long. Moses was not sold, but most of his siblings were.⁴²⁹ Slaveholders also promised slaves they would be free, either through sale, or manumission, sometimes with little intention of following through on their vows. Moses Grandy discovered this after he bought his freedom for \$600 from his owner, Mr. Grice, only to be sold by Grice to a Mr. Trewitt. Grandy would buy his liberty twice more before he would be freed, ultimately spending \$1,850 purchasing himself.⁴³⁰ Henry “Box” Brown claimed that situations like this were not uncommon, and that he had “known many slaves” who worked “unusually hard” in an effort to purchase themselves, only to find that “after they paid for themselves over and over again” they were “still refused what they had so fully paid for, and what they so ardently desired” by their “unprincipled” masters.⁴³¹ Time and time again slaveholders proved that for all their talk of loyalty and mutual affection profit took precedent over trying to sustain trust with one’s slaves.

Slave narratives reveal that enslaved people were acutely aware that there were a number of reasons why a master’s promises might never come to fruition. Harriet Jacobs knew this all too well, declaring that “the promises made to slaves, though with kind intentions, and sincere at the time, depend upon many contingencies for their

⁴²⁸ Henry “Box” Brown *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown* (2002) 42-43

⁴²⁹ Moses Grandy in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) 5-6

⁴³⁰ Ibid, 11-12; 46

⁴³¹ Henry “Box” Brown *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown* (2002) 27-28

fulfillment.”⁴³² Interestingly, she was not saying that the promises of all slaveholders were tantamount to lies. Rather, a “promise” could be “made” that was completely “sincere,” but that would still never be realized. Harriet Jacob’s brother William hinted at how little he trusted his owner’s word when he ran away from the man, though he had repeatedly claimed that he would free William in five years’ time. Even if his master was not making false promises to secure William’s work and honesty, a variety of other factors could determine his fate. William understood that his master might decide to “postpone the promise he had made,” he “might come under pecuniary embarrassments, and his property might be seized by creditors; or he might die, without making arrangements” for William to be freed. William ruefully observed that he “had too often known such accidents to happen to slaves who had kind masters.”⁴³³ The lesson here was that slaveholders’ promises and professions of affective ties were of little worth in a society in which market forces dominated and people were commodified.

During her time in bondage Harriet Jacobs learned that some of the least valuable vows were those made by slaveholders hoping to exchange the promised of benefits for sexual favors. Jacobs described how she watched as her master, Dr. Flint, sold an enslaved woman who was believed to be the mother of one of his children. As the woman was taken away to the slave trader she cried out to her master “You *promised* to treat me well.”⁴³⁴ Dr. Flint’s actions confirmed for Jacobs that he was not to be trusted. More importantly, the sale of the enslaved woman showed her that even if a slave had sexual relations with a master, coerced or consensual, it was no insurance that they would ever receive any of the favors or security they might have been promised. Later Jacobs made

⁴³² Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 111

⁴³³ *ibid* 112

⁴³⁴ *ibid*, 15

the calculated decision to engage in a sexual relationship with a Mr. Sands, who was not her owner, rather than succumb to the harassment of Dr. Flint, partially due to her hope that intimacy with Sands could protect her from Flint.⁴³⁵ However, she was once again reminded that sexual relations were no guarantee that freedom would be given, or that assurances would be kept. Jacobs and Sands had two children, a son named Benjamin, and a daughter named Ellen, whom Sands secretly purchased, and vowed to free. But after becoming a congressman and having children with his white wife, Sands sent for Ellen to look after her white half-sister, and Jacobs became afraid that his promises would be forgotten. She recalled regretfully “how protectively and persuasively” Sands had spoken to her in the past, concluding that “the links of such relations as he had formed with me, are easily broken and cast away as rubbish.”⁴³⁶ This suggests that even those who knew that slaveholders would likely make and break promises either still held out hope that sexual relations could be exchanged for long-term or short-term gains, or had few other options. Her memory of how Sands had once spoken so “persuasively” and the anger the enslaved woman felt at Flint breaking his promise to “treat” her “well” are perhaps evidence that slaveholders knowingly exploited the belief that an exchange was underway in order to coerce sexual relations.

Authors of slave narratives often shared stories of slaves being betrayed by white people, seemingly as a warning against trusting any white person, regardless of their class. Some stories were passed down through families, keeping family history alive, and

⁴³⁵ Jacobs was equally wary of the vows made by her mistress, Mrs. Flint, who “promised to protect” Jacobs from her husband’s sexual abuses. Jacobs said that she “should have been comforted by this assurance if I could have confidence in it; but my experiences in slavery had filled me with distrust.... I knew I could not expect kindness or confidence from her under the circumstances.” Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 31

⁴³⁶ Ibid, 117

teaching young enslaved people how to navigate the emotional politics of slavery, and avoid being duped.⁴³⁷ Other anecdotes circulated within slave communities in order to warn against specific slave masters. Frederick Douglass recounted one such story that he had heard many times, of an infamous interaction that took place between his master, Colonel Lloyd, and one of Lloyd's many slaves. According to Douglass, Lloyd owned enough slaves that he did not recognize them all, and the slaves on his satellite farms did not know Lloyd by sight. As a result, Lloyd one day encountered a man of color on the road and asked who his master was, to which the man replied "Colonel Lloyd." Lloyd did not reveal his identity, but asked "does the colonel treat you well," to which the slave responded "No, sir." Lloyd pressed him further about his conditions, asking how much work he had to do, and how much food he received. The slave claimed that he was worked "too hard," but conceded that he was fed "enough, such as it is." Lloyd never admitted to the man that *he* was in fact his owner, and the slave continued on, "never dreaming that he had been conversing with his master." Several weeks passed until Lloyd's overseer told the slave that for critiquing his master he was to be punished by being sold. The moral of the story, as Douglass warily observed, was that there was a "penalty" for "telling the truth."⁴³⁸

⁴³⁷ For example, Mattie Jackson had been told how her grandfather was emancipated, but later kidnapped, robbed of his free papers, and sold into slavery by a white man whom he believed to be a business partner, but who was really a "Judas-like friend, who had received the bounty." The moral of the story was twofold: that freedom was tenuous and vulnerable, and that white people were not to be trusted.

Similarly, a white man had worked for years beside James W. C. Pennington's father, and "who professed a warm friendship to our family" betrayed the Pennington's by giving a letter intended for James' father to their master. Suspecting that they had helped James run away the Pennington "family was divided" and sold South. Interestingly, the family was eventually reunited and sent "back to Virginia," which James attributed to the fact that his father was in a "situation of considerable trust" which enabled him to prove his loyalty and trustworthiness. Mattie Jackson from William L. Andrews ed. *Six Women's Slave Narratives* (1988) 5-6; James W.C. Pennington in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) 58-59

⁴³⁸ Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, 30

The woeful tale provided two related lessons to enslaved people: treat all whites as though they might be your (untrustworthy) master, and lie when asked how you feel about your enslavement. Douglass claimed that as a result of incidents such as this one, when asked about “their condition and the characters of their masters” enslaved people “almost universally say they are contented, and that their masters are kind.” Slaves had been led to believe that their masters would circulate “spies” amongst their slaves “to ascertain their views and feelings” about their treatment. Whether this was true of any or all masters or not, the rumor was powerful enough that it taught slaves to self-censor, and, more grievously, fostered distrust rather than solidarity amongst the slave community. Douglass vouched that these lessons were effectively ingrained in him, as he claimed that he had often been “asked, when a slave, if I had a kind master,” and he never responded with “a negative answer.”⁴³⁹ This passage suggests that some of the scripts slaves used to enact loyalty were learned from other slaves, sometimes through their trial and error.

Rawls and David argue that turning such incidents into cautionary tales served an important function. In their work on trust they claim that in order to “make sense of interactions that have been problematic,” where communication or trust broke down, those involved attempt to resolve the unsuccessful “interaction” by turning it into “stories” to tell “to others.” Over time, “The more often interactions fail, the stronger the

⁴³⁹ Douglass recounted this same anecdote almost word for word in his second narrative, *My Bondage and My Freedom*. This is true of many brief incidents from Douglass’s first narrative, some of which he would quote verbatim from his first autobiography. The fact that he did not do so here, but used such similar wording when describing the incident a second time, underscores the idea that this was a story that had been told repeatedly, to him and to others. Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, 30-31; Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom* (2003 [1855]) 88-89

narrative accounts will become.”⁴⁴⁰ This meant that each time an enslaved person or planter passed down a tale of a breach of confidence it not only served as a warning against trusting an individual master or enslaved person, it helped to perpetuate the belief that slaveholders and slaves categorically could not be trusted.

Aware that their slaves did not trust them, and that their distrust might be an obstacle for them, some members of the planter class made concerted efforts to appear trustworthy to enslaved people. Henry “Box” Brown described how a man who was trying to buy his wife came to Brown because he didn’t have enough money, and he hoped Brown would lend him fifty dollars. In return, the man swore that he would make sure that Brown and his wife were not separated. Brown recalled that he was “a little suspicious about being fooled out of my money,” so he asked the man “what security” he had that his wife would not be sold in spite of the promise. The man responded defensively, asking Brown “do you think...that I could have the heart to sell your wife to any person other than yourself, and particularly knowing that your wife is my sister and you are my brother in the Lord; while all of us are members of the church?” Brown was skeptical of the man’s religious professions, but he ultimately decided to lend him the money, not because the man “feigned piety” or because he “had implicit faith” in the man’s assurances, but because he believed that the man would feel an “obligation to me” based on the loan.⁴⁴¹

This exchange is particularly interesting because while trust was established long enough for the money to be lent, neither man trusted the other for the expected reason.

The would-be slave buyer clearly believed that a show of religion (which was also

⁴⁴⁰ Anne Warfield Rawls and Gary David "Accountably Other: Trust, Reciprocity and Exclusion in a Context of Situated Practice" from "Human Studies," 28-4, (October, 2005) 489-490

⁴⁴¹ Henry “Box” Brown *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown* (2002) 48

couched in the language of family, and of peers) would make Brown trust him, while Brown believed that lending the man money would render the man loyal to his promise (and might, in the long-run, “be somewhat to the advantage of my wife.”)⁴⁴² Sadly, the man should not have been trusted, as he sold Brown’s wife for a profit. It is unclear if the man had intended all along to sell her, or if he had planned on keeping the promise he made. In any case, this example of deceit suggests that members of the planter class tried in some cases to make themselves appear trustworthy in the hopes of obtaining a short-term goal (a fifty dollar loan) or a long-term gain (the profit he made from the sale.) Other masters tried to circumvent their slave’s mistrust by working through proxies whom the slave might trust more. After Harriet Jacobs ran away, her master Dr. Flint could not punish her disloyalty, so he sought the assistance of her family, asking her aunts and uncles to help locate her. He asked her uncle Phillip to go to New York to look for her, because, he argued “You are her relative, and she would trust *you*,” while “She might object to coming with *me*.”⁴⁴³

Some slaveholders, rather than trying to appear trustworthy to their slaves, deliberately fostered an environment of mistrust, often in the hopes of obtaining more labor from their slaves. One method, described by Henry Bibb, was for overseers to motivate slaves by trying to “deceive them” into working harder for a prize or other “inducement.” With the lure of a reward slaves would pick tirelessly, but once the overseer saw how much each slaves was capable of picking they were whipped “if they did not pick just as much” in the future.⁴⁴⁴ Bibb’s overseer was not the alone in trying to exploit slaves’ trust and mistrust as a method of discipline and labor control. Frederick

⁴⁴² Ibid, 45

⁴⁴³ Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 108

⁴⁴⁴ Henry Bibb from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa* (1969) 122

Douglass claimed that his master Covey's slaves labored diligently "in his absence almost as well as his presence," because he kept his slaves on guard by frequently "surprising" them. One of his strategies was to "crawl on his hands and knees to avoid detection" while slaves were working in the field, and once near them he would jump up and holler. Once they knew that this was his favorite tactic, they felt that "it was never safe to stop" working, even for a moment. While it was horrifying to Douglass that Covey's every waking hour was seemingly "devoted to planning and perpetrating the grossest deceptions," even more terrifying was Douglass's belief that "There was no deceiving him."⁴⁴⁵ This two-pronged attack insured that slaves felt a constant sense of unease, scared that they were about to be tricked, as well as convinced that Covey himself could not be fooled in return. So why might Covey have strived to keep his slaves in a state of wariness, rather than trying to secure their trust in him? Perhaps he did so because unlike a slaveowner who might try to create an environment of trust through a variety of promises, Covey had only *hired* his slaves. Since Covey leased the slaves for a year at a time he couldn't promise them care in their old age, or manumission in return for their loyalty.

Though slaves and slaveholders may have had profound distrust for one another trust was nonetheless vital, enabling the many daily exchanges that took place between them. A number of sociologists have studied how trust functions (or does not) and all have shown that, as Trudy Govier explains, "In complex societies we need to trust many

⁴⁴⁵ Interestingly, Douglass suggested that Covey's passion for lying was at odds with his inability to be tricked, as he was seemingly capable of tricking himself. Commenting on his religious fervor (which Douglass believed was feigned or hypocritical) Douglas claimed that he thought that Covey "sometimes deceived himself into the solemn belief, that he was a sincere worshipper." Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, 61

other people.”⁴⁴⁶ Govier adds that having confidence in others is unavoidable because “trust is the glue of social life... more prevalent and more significant than most of us appreciate.” As a result, she claims that when confidence in one another “diminishes, society and community are diminished as well.”⁴⁴⁷ Anne Warfield Rawls and Gary David would argue that a society rife with mistrust is weakened because trust is necessary to forge the “*situated interactions* in which the essential economic, political, and social interactions take place.”⁴⁴⁸ I would argue that trust not only facilitates interactions intended to negotiate power, trust *is* power, with a very real economic, political and social value.

Of course, overcoming mistrust was not without complications. Rawls and David assert that trust and suspicion necessarily go hand-in-hand, observing that “Social trust and distrust are attitudes of people who live together and are boundlessly interdependent and vulnerable to each other.”⁴⁴⁹ Because of the attendant vulnerability Govier admits that “Trust is, by definition, risky,” but points out that there are also “risks to distrust.”⁴⁵⁰ Slaveholders and enslaved people alike would have to weigh the potential “risks of distrust,” and decide what was at stake in trusting, in order to navigate the constant negotiations and conflicts of slavery.

In a society steeped in mutual mistrust, how did slaveholders and enslaved people obtain trust and honesty, even of the most tenuous and temporary variety? According to

⁴⁴⁶ For examples of work that argues that trust is vital to a functioning society, see Anne Warfield Rawls and Gary David "Accountably Other: Trust, Reciprocity and Exclusion in a Context of Situated Practice" from "Human Studies," 28-4, (October, 2005) 470-471, see also the work of Harold Garfinkel, especially *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (Polity, 1991); Trudy Govier *Social Trust and Human Communities* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997) 26

⁴⁴⁷ Trudy Govier *Social Trust and Human Communities*, xi

⁴⁴⁸ Anne Warfield Rawls and Gary David "Accountably Other: Trust, Reciprocity and Exclusion in a Context of Situated Practice" from "Human Studies," 28-4, (October, 2005) 474

⁴⁴⁹ Trudy Govier *Social Trust and Human Communities*, xi

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 18

Frederick Douglass, slaveholders often resorted to force to insure their slaves' sincerity, observing that "Suspicion and torture are the approved methods of getting at truth here."⁴⁵¹ This may have been his experience, but other authors of slave narratives spoke of a number of other ways that slaveholders established trust and warded off dishonesty. Some slaveholders employed rewards, including praise and the promise of freedom or other benefits to trustworthy slaves. Aware of the ways that slaveholders valued trust slaves sought to negotiate the rewards of trustworthiness, even as they continued to mistrust their masters. Because of this enduring distrust slaveholders and slaves alike practiced amateur phrenology and physiognomy in an effort to ascertain sincerity and establish trust.

Many members of the planter class decided that the best method of obtaining trustworthy, sincere behavior from their slaves was to reward those who were faithful or honest. Some slaveholders seemed to agree with William Harper's claim that slaves were "excitable by praise," and invested in lauding loyal behavior in particular. Perhaps this is what William Jacob's master intended when he penned a letter to the slaves' family claiming that William "had proved a most faithful servant, and...that no mother had ever trained a better boy."⁴⁵² This suggested that slave parents were responsible for inculcating their children with a sense of loyalty, but "faithful" service was not expected, rather it was still notable enough to garner "praise." The Crafts' narrative shows that these compliments might also come from strangers. Having observed William Craft interact with his supposed master a gentleman on the train in Virginia exclaimed "'I reckon your master's father hasn't any more such faithful and smart boys as you'" to which William

⁴⁵¹ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom* (2003 [1855]) 203

⁴⁵² William Harper "Harper's Memoir on Slavery" *The Pro-Slavery Argument*, 81; Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 110

replied “‘O, yes, sir, he has’ I said, ‘lots...’ Which was literally true.”⁴⁵³ William simultaneously deflected the comment and exhibited his dry humor. He was not being modest; he was making light of the fact that of course “lots” of his master’s slaves were more “faithful,” as he was in the process of running away. Though the joke was at the expense of the man who had misread the nature of the loyalty William held for “his master” the observer was correct in perceiving that William was loyal to Ellen. Regardless of the man’s ability to read body language, his words suggest that it was acceptable to praise another person’s slave for exhibiting loyalty.

One tactic slaveholders believed would secure long-term trust was to promise slaves that they would free them, or take excellent care of them in their old age. Through both implicit and explicit promises of liberty or comfortable retirement slaveholders hoped to establish that loyalty in the past and present would be rewarded in the future. Editor D. B. DeBow insinuated that the vow to care for slaves when they grew old was greatly desired by slaves, and a gift in and of itself: “For such a green and cheerful old age, should every faithful servant be permitted to hope.”⁴⁵⁴ Thus the stories planters like James Henry Hammond and George Sawyer told about loyal lifelong slaves not only served to romanticize the relations of slavery, they helped perpetuate the idea of what slaves could “hope” to expect in their “old age” in return for prolonged “faithful” service.⁴⁵⁵ Whether or not enslaved people saw being cared for in their “cheerful old age”

⁴⁵³ William Craft *Running a Thousand Miles For Freedom; or, the Escape of William and Ellen Craft From Slavery*, 59

⁴⁵⁴ D. B. De Bow [The Editor], H. N. McTyeire “Plantation Life—Duties and Responsibilities,” *DeBow’s Review* 29-3 (September 1860) 363

⁴⁵⁵ Legal records suggest that some slaveholders spoke in their wills of leaving “faithful” slaves to be cared for by their children, for example *Pace v. Mealing*, 21 Ga. 28, March 1857; *Walker v. Jones*, 23 Ala. 448, June 1853; *Sheftall v. Roberts*, 30 Ga. 453, January 1860; *Cobb v. Battle*, 34 Ga. 458, June 1866; This was sometimes done after states like Georgia limited the ability of slaveholders to manumit their slaves. Unable to reward loyal slaves with freedom some masters began to establish that their heirs provide for their

as an adequate exchange for a life of unpaid labor to multiple generations of a family is not known, but clearly this was the ultimate reward that slaveholders held out for their slaves to motivate them to be loyal. This speaks volumes about how slaveholders wanted their slaves to perceive them, and about what they thought their slaves wanted in return.

So did slaveholders ever intend to make good on the promises they made to their slaves, or were assurances of freedom and retirement only intended to instill loyalty in the short-term, with no plan that they would ever come to fruition? Court cases show that slaveholders did, on occasion, manumit their slaves, ostensibly as a reward for their loyal service. The infrequency of these cases suggests that it did not happen as often as enslaved people might hope. Nevertheless, that such promises were sometimes realized shows that either slaveholders perceived that fidelity was atypical enough to be worthy of reward, or that they saw the value of proving that their word could be trusted.

One case in particular highlights the nature of the exchange of loyalty for freedom. *Scranton v. Rose Demere and John Demere*, brought before a Georgia court in 1849, concerned the wishes of the late Raymond Demere that his loyal slaves, Joy and Rose, and their children, John and Jim, should be manumitted for their “fidelity.” In his will he described how Joy and Rose “not only saved and protected” his plantation during the British occupation of St. Simons Island, “but actually buried...a large sum of money,” which he recognized that they could very well “have absconded” and used to

slaves, with one master requesting that his “executor” “favor” a “faithful old” slave “as far as may be expedient.” *Tooke v. Hardeman*, 7 GA. 20, June 1849; *Walker v. Jones*, 23 Ala. 448, June 1853 in Helen Tunnicliff Catterall ed. *Judicial Cases concerning American Slavery and the Negro: Volume III Cases from the Courts of Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968 (1926)) For other examples of masters freeing “trusty” and “faithful” slaves see *Cleland v. Waters*, 16 Ga. 496, October 1854; *Harden v. Mangham*, 18 Ga. 563, August 1855; *Hughes v. Allen*, 31 Ga. 483, November 1860; *Carroll v. Brumby*, 13 Ala. 102, January 1858; Of course, other court cases show that some slaveholders simply tried (not always successfully) to sell slaves once they were too old to work. For example see *Huckabee v. Albritton*, 10 Ala. 657, June 1846; *Williams v. Shackelford*, 16 Ala. 318, June 1849;

“obtain...their freedom.” This to Demere was the truest test of loyalty, made all the more meaningful by the fact that during this “period of invasion...nearly all the negroes on St. Simons deserted and joined the British.” His description of what the couple might have done with the money suggests that other slaves on St. Simon’s did just that, or that in his moments of reverie in the intervening years Raymond Demere had stopped and imagined what his life might look like if Rose and Joy had chosen differently. It is impossible to tell why the couple not only stayed but protected their master’s property, but for “their meritorious behavior and faithful conduct” Rose and her surviving son John would eventually receive their freedom, as well as over four thousand dollars.⁴⁵⁶ I say “eventually” not only because of the time that had passed since the British invaded the island, but also because after Raymond Demere’s death, his “executors failed to pay” Rose, Joy and their sons. Though loyalty would pay dividends in time for Rose and John, for Joy and Jim, who had passed away by the time the court decided in their favor, it was too late. Even when enslaved people did reap some form of benefits from loyal behavior it was never on their terms.⁴⁵⁷

Freedom may only have rarely been bestowed on slaves, but enslaved people still knew that manumission was a possibility when a master died. The fact that this expectation existed is evident in the ways that enslaved people reacted when they were *not* freed after their owner’s death. When Henry “Box” Brown’s master was on his

⁴⁵⁶ *Scranton v. Rose Demere and John Demere, by prochein ami*, Ga. 92, Janaury 1849. [93] in Helen Tunnclyff Catterall ed. *Judicial Cases concerning American Slavery and the Negro: Volume III Cases from the Courts of Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968 (1926)) 21-22

⁴⁵⁷ All too often even a master’s intentions to manumit a slave were not enough; many court cases reveal that the state often ignored the requests made in wills to manumit slaves. Examples include *Spencer v. Negroes Amy and Thomas*, R.M.C. 178, May 1822 (Georgia); *Hunter v. Bass*; *American Colonization Society v. Bass*, 18 Ga. 127, May 1855; *Word v. Mitchell*, 32 Ga. 623, May 1861; *Harrison v. Harrison*, 9 Ala. 470, January 1846; *Hooper v. Hooper*, 32 Ala. 669, June 1858

deathbed, he called for Brown and his mother. Brown wrote that they rushed excitedly to his side, wholly convinced that the man was going to manumit them as they “had both expected that we should be set free when master died.” Brown invites the reader to then “imagine our deep disappointment” when the dying man instead advised him to “be an honest boy and never tell an untruth,” and told him that his new owner would be his master’s son, William. Brown claimed that his master “deceived us by his former kind treatment and raised expectations...which were doomed to be overthrown.” Brown did not say if his master had ever explicitly swore that he would free them at his death, but they had received enough assurances of this fate for them to be astonished when they were left in bondage. Thus, when their master died, Brown and his mother “were left to mourn, not so much our master’s death, as our galling bondage.”⁴⁵⁸

This passage highlights the fact that while many masters believed that their slaves longed for nothing more than to be cared for in their old age what slaves truly desired in exchange for loyalty was freedom. Brown observed that “If there is anything which tends to buoy up the spirit of the slave, under the pressure of his severe toils...it is the hope of future freedom.” Brown argued that slaveholders were well aware of this desire, and used it to their advantage: “a great many masters hold out to their slaves the object of purchasing their freedom - in order to induce them to labor more – without...entertaining the slightest idea of ever fulfilling their promise.”⁴⁵⁹ Clearly this was a topic that slaves had discussed; they had perhaps warned each other about such hope-raising deathbed scenarios, and about promises that were all too often unrealized. Nevertheless, such claims produced hope, which could have an immense impact on an enslaved person’s

⁴⁵⁸ Henry “Box” Brown *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown* (2002) 26-27

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 27-28

outlook. After his failed attempt to run away Frederick Douglass's master Thomas Auld vowed to the defiant slaves that if he "behaved...properly" he would free him when he turned twenty-five. Douglass gave "Thanks for this one beam of hope," though he feared it was "too good to be true."⁴⁶⁰ Douglass suggested that even if his master's "promise" seemed unlikely to come to fruition, it still had the advantage of giving him even the slightest "beam of hope." And this, perhaps, reveals why masters like Auld would make such lavish declarations that they may not have intended to keep: a slave prone to run or foment dissent might be compelled to "behave" if it would one day lead to freedom.

The writings of former slaves suggest that many enslaved people were aware that some masters were willing to exchange favors large and small in return for trustworthiness. From a young age Harriet Jacobs sensed that there was a value to fidelity, and that loyal behavior could be traded for a variety of advantages. As a child Jacobs explained she "was accustomed to share some indulgences with the children of my mistress." At the time "Though this seemed to me no more than right, I was grateful for it," so in return she "tried to merit the kindness by the faithful discharge of my duties."⁴⁶¹ This passage implies that while enslaved children like Jacobs might believe that the modicum of "indulgences" they were given was a "right" rather than a privilege that she was also aware that such acts of "kindness" might disappear if she did not respond with "faithful" service. This indicates that even children were aware that enacting loyal behavior or work was a strategic choice, viewed as part of an exchange.

Aware of the importance placed on fidelity by members of the planter class enslaved people sometimes explicitly communicated that they would enact faithful or

⁴⁶⁰ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom* (2003 [1855]) 220-221

⁴⁶¹ Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 26

trustworthy behavior in exchange for benefits. Such bargaining was frequently evident in letters, and on the auction block. In 1834 the enslaved James Hope wrote to his master, expressing his “desir(e)” to be sent back “to his place of Nativity” when his master returned there that Spring. Hope claimed that if the slaveholder allowed him to come back then Hope would respond with “reverence” and “ever...obey his master.” He reiterated his promise of fidelity by signing the letter “from you obt [obedient] servant.”⁴⁶² Though his master may already have assumed and expected that Hope, as his slave, would be “obedient,” Hope’s promise of future “reverence” towards his master emphasized the fact that Hope saw obedience as something earned rather than assumed. The letter also contained the tacit threat that if Hope was *not* permitted to return to his family that he would *not* be “ever” obedient.

If enslaved people believed that loyalty could be bartered they also believed that obedience could not be expected if negotiations of the exchange fell through. Josiah Henson prided himself on his honesty, so he was committed to buying his freedom rather than running away. However, after his master betrayed him by inflating the price of his freedom Henson began to plot ways to escape, claiming that if his master had “been honest enough to adhere to his own bargain, I would have adhered to mine.”⁴⁶³ By breaking his promise to Henson his master had ensured that he would not receive loyalty or honesty in return; Henson believed that a trade had been brokered, and if his owner would not abide by the terms, then neither would he. Of course, some slaveholders

⁴⁶² Enslaved people were known to make similar promises to would-be buyers. Solomon Northup recalled that when a man tried to buy only one of Eliza’s children, she begged the man to buy her daughter and herself as well and “She promised, in that case, to be the most faithful slave that ever lived....A great many times she repeated her former promises – how very faithful and obedient she would be.” In this way Eliza was trying to attach her loyalty to the combined value of her daughter and herself, promising future fidelity in exchange for being sold with a loved one. Solomon Northup from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin’ On Ole Massa* (1969) 264-265; James Hope in John Blassingame *Slave Testimony* (1998) 12-13

⁴⁶³ Josiah Henson *The life of Josiah Henson: formerly a slave, now an inhabitant of Canada*, 1849, 47

realized that they needed to fulfill certain promises in return for continued loyalty from their slaves. When Henson's owner was reluctant to sell him, Henson sought the aid of his master's brother-in-law, who warned the slaveholder "that if he did not take care, and accept a fair offer" from the enslaved man then Henson might run away. "By such arguments as these" the brother-in-law "brought him to an actual bargain," and Henson negotiated the price of his freedom for \$450.⁴⁶⁴ Although this notion that loyalty should be acknowledged with freedom seemed more based in fear of property loss rather than gratitude, it still shows that some planters understood, like Henson, that if they did not reward fidelity they would reap deceit.

Josiah Henson's struggle to purchase his freedom highlights the very real price of loyalty for slaveholders, and the cost of this fidelity to slaves. Though Henson's master initially agreed to let the enslaved man purchase himself for \$450 the terms of the agreement changed after the slaveholder fell deathly ill. Henson nursed his master back to health, which simultaneously reiterated his loyalty, and emphasized his worth. Henson's master reneged on their deal, abruptly raising Henson's price to \$1000. Rather than rewarding Henson for his reliability, his master proved his own inconstancy, and revealed the cost-benefit analysis of faithfulness. Henson felt cheated, and disparaged his master for his lack of "obligation to me," marveling that having saved his master's life did not provoke "sympathy, or any feeling of attachment to me," but rather served "only to enhance my money value."⁴⁶⁵ This experience taught Henson that loyalty functioned as currency in a very real way, but enslaved people would rarely profit from it.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid, 32-33

⁴⁶⁵ Josiah Henson *The life of Josiah Henson: formerly a slave, now an inhabitant of Canada*, 1849, 47

Henry Bibb witnessed how the commodification of fidelity operated in the market place when his master fell into debt and was forced to sell many of his slaves. As the planter tried to auction off an elderly slave named Richard he was asked whether the aged man was still able to work. The slaveholder responded that though the man could do little “manual labor” due to “his extreme age” that he:

“would rather have him than many of those who are young and vigorous; who are able to perform twice as much labor – because I know him to be faithful and trustworthy, a Christian in good standing in my church. I can trust him anywhere with confidence.”⁴⁶⁶

It is impossible to say if the slaveholder truly meant that he placed more value on the fact that Richard was “trustworthy” and “faithful” than he would on a younger, more “vigorous” man. However, the fact that he made this declaration at an auction, when he needed desperately to cover his debts, suggests that he certainly thought that the prospective buyers present would believe that there was a market price to these qualities. The sales pitch succeeded, as Bibb observed that someone was willing to spend almost “two hundred dollars” on Richard because of his reputed “good Christian character.”⁴⁶⁷

Bibb also saw how much dishonesty was believed to depreciate a slave’s worth when another owner tried to sell the defiant Bibb for having run away so many times.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁶ Henry Bibb from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin’ On Ole Massa* (1969) 169-170

⁴⁶⁷ As the Bibb passages show, describing a slave as “Christian” was often meant to signal their trustworthiness and honesty. According to William Wells Brown, “It was not uncommon in St. Louis” to hear a slave being described by an auctioneer as “She is a good cook, good washer, a good obedient servant. She has got religion!” Brown claimed that this signaled to would-be buyers that a slave be loyal and docile. In this way, religion was an indicator of future obedience, which was why slaveholders believed “religion very profitable to them.” William Wells Brown from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin’ On Ole Massa* (1969) 211

⁴⁶⁸ For more on the price of trust, and how distrustful slaves were valued see Eugene Genovese’s chapter on slave theft. Genovese describes Mississippi planters who decided “to sell” an enslaved “woman whom they could not keep from stealing from them.” Eugene D. Genovese *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, 607; Court cases also reveal how often masters lied about the veracity of their slaves. One Alabama court case from 1833 claimed that the defendant asserted that a slave he sold “was honest, industrious and free from vice.” But the plaintiff argued that “The slave was, in fact, so dishonest, lazy and vicious...that he...was of little or no value.” *Cozzins v. Whitaker*, 3 Stew. And P. 322, January 1833 [323]; See also *Bell v. Troy*, 35, Ala. 184, June 1859. [186] in which Bell was accused of trying to sell a slave that was a known

Whenever potential buyers asked Bibb if he “had ever run away” in the past, his master “would generally answer this question for me in the negative,” denying that Bibb had ever escaped and instead expounding upon Bibb’s “Christian character” in order to “make it appear that I was so pious and honest.” Bibb said this was false, as he “never had religion enough to keep me from running away,” pointing out the double-lie taking place on the auction block, as his master lied about Bibb’s supposed trustworthiness.⁴⁶⁹

But the monetary value attached to Christianity was not the only reason to encourage religiosity amongst one’s slaves; many slaveholders believed in proactively insuring their slaves’ trustworthiness through religious training. According to Henry Brown, from a young age enslaved children were indoctrinated with Christian teachings to be honest and obedient to their masters.⁴⁷⁰ Of course, if members of the planter class hoped that Christian slaves were more likely to be truthful and trustworthy, their religious inculcation also highlighted the hypocrisy of their supposedly faithful masters. Henry Bibb observed this when a man who had interrogated Bibb at length about his trustworthiness before buying him was “one of the basest hypocrites that I ever saw,” who spoke “like the best of slave holding Christians, and acted at home like the devil.”⁴⁷¹ Henry Brown explained that slaves could not “believe or trust in such a religion” as that of slaveholders because it was designed for “deceiving the poor slaves” into adhering to the dictum: “Servants be obedient to your masters.” Brown believed that “a white man” could “lie, and rob the slaves, and do anything else” as long as he “read the bible and

arsonist and thief. Occasionally enslaved people sold under such circumstances would admit the deceit to their new owner, as we see in the case of *Stringfellow v. Mariott*, 1 Ala. 573, June 1840;

⁴⁶⁹ Henry Bibb from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa* (1969) 114

⁴⁷⁰ Henry “Box” Brown *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown* (2002) 37-38

⁴⁷¹ Henry Bibb from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa* (1969) 118

joined the church.”⁴⁷² As a result of enslaved people’s suspicions about the sincerity of their master’s faith Frederick Douglass claimed that slaveholders could “sometimes” believe in the religiosity of slaves, but enslaved people could not have the same “confidence in the piety of their masters.”⁴⁷³ Seemingly unbeknownst to slaveholders their tactic for making slaves trustworthy and trusting seems to have had the unintended effect of convincing them that their masters were liars, and not to be trusted.

In a society so fraught with concerns about truth and sincerity, it is little wonder that many people in the nineteenth century sought solace in phrenology, the study of the face and head, in an effort to discern feelings and intentions. According to historian Molly Rogers, physiognomy had been practiced in some form or another since “ancient times.”⁴⁷⁴ These ideas would gain a great deal of traction at the turn of the nineteenth century when Dr. Franz-Joseph Gall of Germany put forth the theory that the traits of a person’s brain (and thus of their personality and character) were visible in the shape of their skull. His former colleague Johan Gaspar Spurzheim, who helped bring phrenology to America, was the first to truly grasp the sociological uses of the practice. But it was their student George Combe who would have the largest role in spreading phrenology, particularly in the United States, by making it accessible to people without medical degrees.⁴⁷⁵ Historian John Davies argues that the science attracted so many people because phrenologists filled the role that “psychologists do today,” as they advised

⁴⁷² Henry “Box” Brown *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown* (2002) 37-39, 41; see also Henry Bibb from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin’ On Ole Massa* (1969) 69, 118

⁴⁷³ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom* (2003 [1855]) 143

⁴⁷⁴ Molly Rogers *Delia’s Tears: Race, Science, and Photography in Nineteenth-Century America*, 12

⁴⁷⁵ Stephen Tomlinson *Head Masters: Phrenology, Secular Education, and Nineteenth-Century Social Thought* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2005) xii-xiii; John D. Davies *Phrenology Fad and Science: a 19th-Century American Crusade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955) xiii, 1, 7, 10, 31, 40; For more on the popularization of phrenology in England see Sharrona Pearl *About Faces: Physiognomy in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2010)

people in the nineteenth century “how to be happy” and live a successful life.⁴⁷⁶ But nineteenth century Americans not only used phrenology to understand themselves, they employed the study in an effort to anticipate the emotions and actions of others. Sharrona Pearl claims that in the increasingly urban and anonymous “Victorian city,” the allure and “the power of physiognomy lay in its ability to penetrate privacy in order to predict” future behavior, and in particular, “deviance.”⁴⁷⁷ Phrenology charts of the day explained that one’s “propensities” were judged from the back and sides of the head and one’s “sentiments” from the top of the head.⁴⁷⁸ Phrenologists believed that these “propensities” included “Combateness,” “Benevolence” and “Amativeness.” In this was a practitioner could discern the “evil” traits of a person in the skull’s terrain.⁴⁷⁹ Phrenological societies formed in the United States, mostly in the Northeast, championed by political and intellectual elites from Nicholas Biddle to Henry Ward Beecher. But the mania for phrenology also gained traction in the South. According to John Davies, the *Southern Review* believed phrenology to be “most distinctly absurd and untenable.”⁴⁸⁰ Nevertheless, the practice spread beyond cosmopolitan centers, as Davies posits that “during the 1830’s and 40’s there was probably not a village in the nation that did not entertain at least one visit from an itinerant practical phrenologist.”⁴⁸¹ In her 1838

⁴⁷⁶ John D. Davies *Phrenology Fad and Science: a 19th-Century American Crusade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955) 5

⁴⁷⁷ For more on using physiognomy to deter “deviance” and avoid “confidence men” see Karen Halttunen *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830 - 1870*, 40-42; Sharrona Pearl *About Faces: Physiognomy in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 9

⁴⁷⁸ According to Sharrona Pearl “some purists insisted that physiognomy referred only to the shape and structure of facial features and extremities,” but that “most” practitioners also studied the face, and some even analyzed body types... hairstyle, clothing, and self-presentation” more “broadly.” Sharrona Pearl *About Faces: Physiognomy in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 6; Stephen Tomlinson *Head Masters: Phrenology, Secular Education, and Nineteenth-Century Social Thought*, xii-xiii

⁴⁷⁹ John D. Davies *Phrenology Fad and Science: a 19th-Century American Crusade*, 4, 8

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 13, 15, 22, 24-27, 31-32

⁴⁸¹ Phrenology was even used to explain the root causes and course of the Civil War. L.M. Smith, a self-described “practical phrenologist,” argued in his 1862 book that Abraham Lincoln possessed “only a

travelogue *Retrospect of Western Travel* Harriet Martineau recalled how popular phrenology became in the highest circles of Southern society, noting that in “Richmond and Charleston” ladies and gentleman alike were known to “tear off caps and wigs” to ascertain their propensities. Another visitor to the South, the antislavery British author James Stirling, used “physiognomy,” the study of the face in particular, to counter proslavery claims that enslaved people were content. During his 1856 tour of the United States Stirling asserted that enslaved people were “not happy. The slave physiognomy... struck me as depressed” and “gloomy.”⁴⁸² As Stirling’s passage suggests, defenders and detractors of slavery deployed phrenology to support their arguments, while slaveholders and slaves alike would find a variety of ways to use phrenology and physiognomy to navigate their daily affective interactions.

Slaveholders often scanned their slaves’ faces in the hopes of understanding what their slaves thought or felt. They were looking for any emotions that might be at odds with what their slaves said and did, which could reveal slaves’ affective behavior to be performed, and thus potentially insincere and untrustworthy. When Fanny Kemble claimed that the enslaved Jack denied a desire for freedom “that absolutely glowed in his every feature” or boasted that she could see that the cook’s lies were “child-like, and transparent,” what she was really saying was that she believed herself to be skilled at reading slaves’ body language and facial cues, and determining if they were lying or not.⁴⁸³ Frederick Douglass shed light on what slaveholders were looking for when they

moderate endowment of Self-Esteem" which allegedly made him "fearful of taking a false step." L.M. Smith *The Great American Crisis: Or Cause and Cure of the Rebellion* (Cincinnati, OH: Johnson, Stephens and Co., Steam Printers 1862) 17; John D. Davies *Phrenology Fad and Science: a 19th-Century American Crusade*, 28, 32, quoted from Harriet Martineau *Retrospect of Western Travel* (1838) 188-189

⁴⁸² James Stirling *Letters From the Slave States* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969) 49

⁴⁸³ Frances Anne Kemble *Journal of a Residence On a Georgian Plantation*, 24-25, 81

peered questioningly into their slaves' faces, noting that "Unusual sobriety, apparent abstraction, sullenness and indifference – indeed, any mood" that seemed unusual, and thus was "ground for suspicion and inquiry."⁴⁸⁴ Knowing that "any" emotion that was "out of the" ordinary would be perceived with "suspicion" did not always help enslaved people quell what they felt. Douglass asserted that his plan to run away with several other slaves might have been given away because of their unguarded "joyous exclamations," and the fact that in the days before escape they "were, at times, remarkably buoyant" and "singing."⁴⁸⁵

Slaveholders also used pathognomy to root out deceit. When Hugh Auld was hiring Douglass out in Baltimore Douglass resented the weekly ritual of Auld counting the wages Douglass had earned for him. According to Douglass it "vexed" him that Auld expected "the reward of my honest toil." But he was even more troubled by the fact that as Auld examined the money "dollar by dollar" he "would look me in the face, as if he would search my heart as well as my pocket, and reproachfully ask me, '*Is that all?*'" insinuating that Douglass had "kept back" some of his wages.⁴⁸⁶ Clearly Auld believed that the contents of Douglass's "heart" were legible on his face, and thus reveal if Douglass was lying. Auld may also have thought that his attempts at physiognomy might provoke a confession from Douglass, or at least prevent him from stealing in the future. It is unclear if it worked as a lie detector or to reduce theft, but certainly Douglass resented the practice. His contempt for being treated so suspiciously when he was being honest

⁴⁸⁴ The belief that the face would divulge one's intentions was so intense that Josiah Henson worried that even after he decided *not* to murder his white captors that they felt "fear that my companions would detect it in my face." Josiah Henson *The life of Josiah Henson: formerly a slave, now an inhabitant of Canada*, 1849, 43; Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom* (2003 [1855]) 202

⁴⁸⁵ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom* (2003 [1855]) 203

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 237

suggests that slaves were not only concerned that their masters would detect what they felt, they resented being perceived as untrustworthy. Douglass may also have resented the idea that his private thoughts were being read, or that he had to work harder to mask them.

Other slaveholders worried that though they pored over their slaves' faces they could not comprehend them. Mary Chesnut frequently discussed these concerns in her journal, remarking that she was "always studying these creatures," but she found her slaves "inscrutable." Try as she might she could not "see any change in them... Their faces are unreadable as the sphinx." She became increasingly invested in interpreting enslaved people's faces as the war progressed. Contrary to her expectations, she could not "detect any change in the demeanor of these negro servants," and to her confusion, they continued to appear "placid, docile, kind and obedient."⁴⁸⁷ Perhaps some masters were more perceptive than others, or perhaps some enslaved people were more skilled at affective masking. In any case, members of the planter class remained convinced that, in the words of author Samuel G. Goodrich, "The expression of the countenance is a record which sets forth to the world the habitual feelings" and "the character of the heart," which could be read, if one had the necessary skills.⁴⁸⁸

Slave narratives reveal that enslaved people also employed pathognomy, reading the faces of those around them in order to identify the emotions of fellow slaves, family members, or their masters.⁴⁸⁹ A number of authors stressed how important the legibility

⁴⁸⁷ *Mary Chesnut's Civil War* ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) 48, 114, 233

⁴⁸⁸ Samuel G. Goodrich *What to Do, and How to Do It; or, Morals and Manners Taught by Examples*, quoted in Karen Halttunen *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830 - 1870*, 40-41

⁴⁸⁹ Throughout his narrative, Douglass spoke about reading the emotions of his master's and overseers. I discuss this in more depth in "Chapter 2: 'Born and Reared in Slavery'" Frederick Douglass *My Bondage*

of emotions was to establishing trust, especially with white people. Harriet Jacobs described how after she ran away her grandmother encountered a slaveholding woman who was her childhood friend. What followed was a mutual reading of faces. The slaveholding woman “observed the sad and troubled expression” on Jacob’s grandmother’s face, and guessed that she was upset about Jacobs having run away. In response Jacob’s grandmother “looked earnestly” at the slaveholder, and according to her grandmother “Something in the expression of her face said ‘Trust me!’ and she did trust her,” telling her where Jacobs was hiding. The risk of trusting the slaveholder paid off, as the woman agreed to harbor Jacobs for a while.⁴⁹⁰

But what signs were amateur physiognomists looking for, which features were considered telling, and what affective expressions were viewed as warning signs? In a society obsessed with sincerity, blushing was hailed as expressive behavior that could be neither faked nor suppressed. Physician Thomas Burgess theorized that blushing could be a form of self-sabotage, because a blush arose when a guilty or ashamed person was most concerned with concealing what they felt.⁴⁹¹ This might begin to explain the nineteenth century obsession with the blush. Not only could it not be feigned, if it could not be concealed then it functioned as a guilt detector. Of course, debates about blushing were also laden with racial connotations. Burgess suggested that the inability to see a blush on dark skin was a sign of inscrutability, noting that the blush cannot be “observed in the

and *My Freedom* (2003 [1855]) 62; For more examples of former slaves discussing reading the emotions of fellow slaves or loved ones see James W.C. Pennington in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) viii; Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 116, 128, 145

⁴⁹⁰ For another example of reading appearances to ascertain if a white person could be trusted by a fugitive see William Wells Brown from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa* (1969) 218-219; Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 84

⁴⁹¹ Thomas Henry Burgess *The Physiology or Mechanisms of Blushing* (London: John Scott, 1839) 50; Charles Darwin was heavily influenced by Burgess’s work, and he devoted a lengthy chapter in his 1872 *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* to blushing.

negro's face, which nature seems to have screened with a dark veil."⁴⁹² Burgess in turn cited the work of Alexander von Humboldt, who argued that "only...white men" could blush, an act "which adds so powerful an expression to the emotions of the soul." Humboldt noted that based off of this "insensibility of the features" of people of color "The European, in his inveterate hatred to the Negro and the Indian" might ask "How can those be trusted who know not how to blush?"⁴⁹³ Burgess and Humboldt's work suggests that anatomists in this period were not only concerned with what emotions could be seen, but also with those that could not be observed, with Humboldt suggesting that unseen emotions were grounds for mistrust, and proof of insincerity.

Perhaps because of these debates over the blush, nineteenth century pathognomists sought out other methods of reading facial cues that were supposedly infallible, including focusing on the eyes. In his 1872 work on affective expressions Charles Darwin argued that the eyes were the most accurate indicator of the emotions, particularly of deceit.⁴⁹⁴ The naturalist posited that "Slyness is...exhibited chiefly by

⁴⁹² Thomas Henry Burgess *The Physiology or Mechanisms of Blushing* (1839) 30-31

⁴⁹³ Another frequent and even more baffling claim was that people of African descent *did* blush, but this could only be seen in facial scars. In his study of anatomy and expression, first published in England in 1806 neurologist Charles Bell stated that he did not "believe that a blush may be seen in the Negro." He did concede in a footnote that since "a wound" on the flesh of a person with dark skin "leaves a scar" in a lighter shade, that "the white spot formed by such a cicatrix in the face of the Negro reddens with passion." Thomas Burgess claimed that he has also witnessed this phenomenon as he had "frequently observed a Negress, a servant in a gentleman's house, who had one of these scars on the cheek, which invariably became *red* whenever she was abruptly spoken to, or charged with any trivial offense." Bell and Burgess's theory had staying power, as Darwin would reference their blushing scar stories in his 1872 work. Alexander von Humboldt's *Personal Narrative of Travel to the Equinoctial Regions of the New Continent, Vol. III* (London: 1818) 229-230; Charles Bell *The Anatomy and Philosophy of Expression As Connected with The Fine Arts* (London: Henry G. Hohn, York Street, Coventry Garden, 1865 (1806)) 89; Dr. Thomas Henry Burgess's *The Physiology or Mechanism of Blushing*, 31-32; Charles Darwin *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, ed. With an introduction, afterword and commentaries by Paul Ekman (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, [1872] 2009) 318

⁴⁹⁴ Though published in 1872, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* was very much informed by Antebellum ideas about racialized emotions. Darwin became interested in the subject of

movements about the eyes; for these are less under the control of the will...than are the movements of the body."⁴⁹⁵ William and Ellen Crafts' narrative provided insight into how the eyes could be used by members of the Antebellum South to identify and reveal someone's true sentiments or intentions. While on the train a man complemented Ellen on William's loyal behavior, before warning her that "you had better watch him like a hawk" when they arrived in the North, because "He seems all very well here, but he may act quite differently there." A "rough slave dealer" in the same train car agreed, claiming that he could "see from the cut of his eye" that William was "certain to run away....if he had half a chance," and offered to buy William before he go that chance.⁴⁹⁶ What these men asserted was that enslaved behavior, and particularly the inconstancy or deceit of slaves, could be policed and interpreted through the eyes. Their cautionary words suggested two ways that the eyes could be used to determine a slave's feelings, and to prevent undesirable behavior. The first man advised that a slaveholder could use their own eyes to prevent escape or duplicity by vigilantly monitoring a slave's behavior, or watching them "like a hawk." The slave trader remarked that slaveholders could also use their slaves' eyes to interpret motives and character, discerning "from the cut" of a slave's eye what they truly felt. People like the slave dealer who based their livelihood in the trade of human beings, capital which had thoughts, feelings and hopes, must have found comfort in the notion that these sentiments and desires were not opaque, but could be read by and through the eyes.

affective expressions when his son William, born in 1839, was a baby. Darwin began work in earnest on *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* in 1859

⁴⁹⁵ Charles Darwin *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, 262

⁴⁹⁶ William Craft *Running a Thousand Miles For Freedom*, 46-48

Described as “rough” by William, the brusque slave trader who tried to purchase William may have been intimidating to the Crafts, and Ellen may have even feared that he *could* see her true identity. Nevertheless, as an anecdote told in hindsight, the story took on a slightly mocking tone; while the slave trader boasted of his skills at perception (and was in fact correct in his belief that William had the look of a slave who intended to run) he failed to see Ellen’s dual duplicity, as an enslaved woman disguised as a slaveholding male. Ultimately, William Craft was scoffing at men like the trader who believed that they were ocular experts, capable of reading a slave’s intentions and feelings with their eyes, but in the moment Ellen may have been genuinely afraid that her might give her away. Ellen shared the slave trader’s belief that the eyes might reveal too much about a person’s feelings or character. When William bought the clothing that would compose her costume, she requested that he buy her spectacles with tinted lenses because she thought “she could get on better if she had something to go over the eyes” while she was in “the company of gentlemen.”⁴⁹⁷

Enslaved people were clearly concerned that their faces could reveal their emotions and desires. On the eve of an attempted escape Frederick Douglass felt that he had “Thoughts and purposes so incendiary” that he feared they were “manifest to scrutinizing and unfriendly beholders.” Douglass claimed that he right to worry that his “sable face might prove altogether too transparent” observing that “even greater” plots than his had “leaked through stone walls,” and his face, he worried, “was no stone wall.” Douglass explained that these anxieties were well founded, based in the knowledge that “many” slaveholders were savvy enough to “attain astonishing proficiency in discerning the thoughts and emotions of slaves.” Since their profits depended upon human labor they

⁴⁹⁷ William Craft *Running a Thousand Miles For Freedom*, 35

became scholars in the “study” of “human nature.” Thus slaveholders learned to observe their slaves “with skilled and practiced eyes, and... learned to read, with great accuracy, the state of mind and heart of the slave, through his sable face.” Whether or not the average Southern slaveholder truly excelled at amateur pathognomy, what is all too clear from Douglass’s text was that masters had successfully convinced their slaves that their emotions could be easily read on their faces, and that revealing certain thoughts or feelings was a punishable offense.

Aware of the rewards for honesty and the punishments for disloyalty, and concerned that their true feelings and intentions could be read on their faces, enslaved people had to make difficult choices about how and when to lie. Some former slaves went into great detail discussing this decision process; Josiah Henson in particular dramatized his inner conflict about being deceitful. Throughout his narrative, Henson not only frequently defended his honesty, he would go into elaborate description of crimes or mistrustful deeds he *could* have committed but didn’t, including how he could have escaped with many other slaves in tow.⁴⁹⁸ In February of 1825 Henson’s master asked him to lead some slaves to his brother’s Kentucky plantation. Henson explained to his reader that as guided his fellow slaves the idea dawned on him that they were walking close to Ohio, and freedom. He noted that though he greatly desired his liberty he had never “indulged” the “idea of running away” because he “had a sentiment of honor on

⁴⁹⁸ For example, when his master sent him down the Mississippi Henson feared he could not survive as a slave in the Deep South, so he contemplated killing the men who were taking him there. Henson decided to kill them, steal their money “and escape to the North.” He went into minute detail describing how he was about to slay one man with an axe when “suddenly the thought came to me, ‘What! Commit *murder*! and you a Christian?’” and he grew ashamed of his murderous intentions. Henson may have laid out these hypothetical plots to build suspense, but he may also have been doing so to emphasize his personal integrity. By first explaining how he was justified in murdering those who enslaved him, and then articulating why he did not, his honor was doubly proven. Josiah Henson *The life of Josiah Henson: formerly a slave, now an inhabitant of Canada*, 1849, 41-43

the subject...which I would not have violated even for freedom.” Though he had often doled out extra food rations to his fellow slaves, Henson made clear that his sense of “honor,” which was deeply rooted in notions of honesty and trust, would not permit him to steal himself from his master, or to leave unbidden. But suddenly brought so close to Ohio, Henson was faced with “an opportunity I had not anticipated” as he realized that he could free all of his fellow enslaved travelers “without the smallest risk, and without injustice to any individual, except” their master “whom...none of us any reason to love, who has been guilty of cruelty and oppression to us all...and who had never shown the smallest sympathy with us.”⁴⁹⁹

Though Henson could say that running away from his dissolute master with his family and peers would have been entirely justified, he still did not take advantage of their proximity to Ohio, nor did he even tell his fellow slaves how close freedom was because he “had promised” his master that he would deliver his slaves to his brother and he vowed to keep his word. Henson acknowledged that though he missed a chance to be free “the sentiment of high honor, I have experienced...I do know, and prize,” and he would not trade his sense of “honor,” even for “an earlier release from bondage.”⁵⁰⁰ Even far from the plantation his “honor” paid dividends for his master, but only because of the value Henson himself placed upon it. Henson had any number of reasons for detailing the opportunities he had to be deceitful, and why he did not take them. Henson may have been trying to create a more exciting tale for his reader, embellishing what was otherwise a straightforward vignette about a slave coffle traveling to Kentucky with a

⁴⁹⁹ Interestingly, even Henson’s internal debate over whether to run or not was framed in emotional terms. Henson defended running away because he and his fellow slaves didn’t “love” their master, and charged the slaveholder with lacking even “the smallest sympathy with” his slaves.

⁵⁰⁰ Josiah Henson *The life of Josiah Henson: formerly a slave, now an inhabitant of Canada*, 1849, 23-25

hypothetical escape. Or perhaps Henson was depicting the internal debates slaves experienced when determining which course of action to take when faced with the option to lie or cheat their master.

Deciding to lie required a great deal of savvy on the part of slaves, who were already perceived as mistrustful. Erving Goffman argued that in scenarios where deceit is not expected, it is much easier to enact, but if someone believes that a person is untrustworthy, and “manipulating the presumably spontaneous aspects” of the interaction then they are on guard for dishonesty.⁵⁰¹ Erving Goffman surmised that during situations when people suspect “that a confidence game could be employed the con man must carefully forestall the immediate impression” that he might be duping them, forcing the would-be deceived to work doubly hard to assuage concerns that they were being untrustworthy.⁵⁰² As an incident from Henry Bibb’s narrative shows, enslaved people had to take the perception that they were untrustworthy into account when considering lying. Knowing all too well that slaves were encouraged to lie in order to facilitate their sales, one potential buyer tried to compel honesty from Bibb. The buyer told him “if you will tell me the truth like a good boy, perhaps I may buy you with your family.” He also asked Bibb if he knew how to read and write, and if he had ever run away before, saying again “Don’t tell me no stories now, like a good fellow, and perhaps I may buy you.” But Bibb observed that since he had no obligation to give this man “the whole truth, I only gave him a part of it, by telling him I had run away once.” This seemed to appease the man, who ended up purchasing Bibb and his family.⁵⁰³

⁵⁰¹ Erving Goffman *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959) 8

⁵⁰² Ibid, 225

⁵⁰³ Henry Bibb from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa*, (1969) 118

Bibb's decision to admit that he had "run away once" suggests that some slaves believed that if slaveholders *expected* them to lie then confessing a smaller lie would be the most credible and advantageous answer. Similarly, when Sella Martin's master asked if he could read, and was reading aloud to other slaves, Martin felt that it was "safest" to admit that he could, in fact, read. Martin's master issued him "a threatening warning" not to tell "him a falsehood" and perhaps because of this "threat," or because Martin feared that he had been betrayed by another slave, Martin swiftly elected to bend the truth. Martin knew he could not completely deny the charges in a society laced with informants and bounded by mistrust, so instead he assured his master that he had only read the bible, hoping that the slaveholder would believe that "there could be no harm in that." It is unclear of his lie helped; his master made him promise that he would "Read nothing to the slaves," but Martin was not punished.⁵⁰⁴

Depending on the stakes of a master's accusations, admitting to even a partial truth was not always an option. When Northup's master demanded to know if he had asked a local white man to mail a letter for him, Northup mounted a three-part defense of his innocence. First Northup vehemently denied the charge, saying that "there is no truth" to the claims, because he had no means to pen a letter, or anyone to send it to. Then he discredited Armsby, the man who had betrayed him to his master, declaring that "Armsby is a lying, drunken fellow...and nobody believes him anyway." Finally he cited his own

⁵⁰⁴ In spite of his master's response and the fact that someone had betrayed him Martin did not stop reading to his fellow slaves. Perhaps because many states had laws which prohibited teaching slaves to read, a great deal of subterfuge was necessary to learn without arousing suspicions, as Martin saw. Frederick Douglass recalled that his primary method for learning the alphabet was tricking local literate boys into teaching him. He explained how any time he encountered a "boy who I knew could write" he would challenge the boy by declaring that he "could write as well as" they could. They would invariably demand proof, and Douglass would comply by writing the few letters he knew. Through this clever method Douglass claimed he received "many lessons in writing, which it quite possible I should never have gotten in any other way." Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, 47-48; Sella Martin in John Blassingame *Slave Testimony* (1998) 702, 709-712

record as an honest individual, saying “You know I always tell the truth.” Northup had, in fact, asked the man to write the letter. Armsby was poor white man who lived nearby with his slave Charlotte and their mixed race children. As such, Armsby was a liminal, marginal figure, someone Northup had *thought* he could trust to mail the letter from him, but whom members of the planter class viewed as disreputable. Because Armsby’s character could be cast in suspect light, and because Northup *could* boast of his own reputation as consistently trustworthy, Northup succeeded in convincing his master that he had been falsely accused, Epps declaring “I’m d_____d...if I don’t believe you tell the truth.”⁵⁰⁵

As Northup’s narrative shows, seeming trustworthy could have of great value to slaves. Elizabeth Keckley recalled how she tried to buy freedom for herself and her son, but her master would not agree to this arrangement. Instead he gave her a few dollars and said that if she truly wanted to go she could use it to “pay the passage of yourself and boy on the ferry-boat, and when you are on the other side of the river you will be free.”⁵⁰⁶

Since he disdainfully refused her offer to purchase herself Keckley was understandably wary of his motives in giving her money and telling her to run away. A cagey Keckley responded by emphasizing her loyalty, apologizing for having “troubled” him with the matter. She further endeared herself to him by pointing out that she did not want to run

⁵⁰⁵ Such defenses did not work when Epps accused the enslaved Patsey of having sexual relations with another white neighbor. Though Patsey swore she had gone to the neighbor’s home to borrow some soap, Epps claimed she had gone there to indulge a “baser passion.” When she denied this he simply declared that she was lying, to which she responded “I *don’t* lie, massa. If you kill me, I’ll stick to that.” Knowing that Epps would beat her regardless of whether she was telling the truth or not she sought to defend her honesty by staking her life on it, almost daring him to kill her. In this way she emphasized that she was telling the truth, while perhaps subtly reminding him that brutally beating her would not incite her to reverse her statement, and would leave him with one less slave to abuse (rape.) This passage suggests that enslaved women may have had a more difficult time proving their trustworthiness, or at least defending their innocence, to slaveholders. Solomon Northup from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin’ On Ole Massa* (1969) 352-354, 367

⁵⁰⁶ Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes, Or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House* (1988) 48

away, though she had ample opportunity to do so. She reminded him that though she could “cross the river any day, as you well know, and have frequently done so” that she would “never leave you in such a manner,” because it would be illegal, and she didn’t want to break the “laws of the land.” According to Keckley her master “expected this answer,” so she knew she had “pleased” him with her profession of loyalty and her commitment to the law. Keckley believed that this test of her loyalty paid dividends, as not long after her master “told me that he had reconsidered the question,” and because she “had served his family faithfully; that I deserved my freedom, and that he would take \$1200 for myself and boy.”⁵⁰⁷ Although Keckley was perhaps not feigning fidelity in the conversation with her master she certainly adopted the role of loyal and honest slave, knowing full well that it would “please” her master, and help her avoid any traps he might be setting with his offer of boat fare. By mentioning the proximity of the ferry Keckley was able to highlight times in the past when she had not run away, while also stressing how easily she could escape in the future. By offering her money to run away in the first place, her master was also subtly acknowledging that her enslavement was contingent on her loyalty in a number of ways.

Trust issues plagued slaveholders and their slaves, but they were also a concern amongst enslaved people. Some of the distrust stemmed from social divisions amongst slaves. Henry Bibb explained to his readers that “domestic slaves are often found to be traitors to their own people, for the purpose of gaining favor with their masters.”⁵⁰⁸ Whether or not “domestic slaves” were more likely to inform on their fellow slaves than others, Bibb’s statement suggests that this perception existed amongst enslaved people.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid, 18-19

⁵⁰⁸ Henry Bibb from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa* (1969) 132

Eugene Genovese claimed that there was a great deal of mistrust within slave communities, and that it stemmed in large part from concerns about theft. He argued that though few “slaves seem to have stolen from each other...one or two thieves would keep an entire plantation agitated and foster mutual suspicion.”⁵⁰⁹ The subject of slaves acting traitorously towards one another seemed to have been of great interest to readers of slave narratives; Jacob Stroyer observed that his “readers ask” if slaves would “betray their fellow negroes... to the white man?” which suggests that the stereotype that enslaved people couldn’t be trusted by slaveholders *or* by their fellow slaves was widespread, and a matter of a great deal of curiosity.⁵¹⁰ Slave narratives do provide many accounts of incidents in which an enslaved person betrayed another, but the authors also showed how enslaved people responded by establishing elaborate methods of identifying and punishing theft and deceit, and forging trust.⁵¹¹

Jacob Stroyer spent a great deal of time discussing how slave communities fostered trust, and disciplined the untrustworthy. He explained that it was common on his plantation for multiple families to share a cabin, and how complicated interactions could become if there was strife between any of the families. According to Stroyer these tensions could foster intense mistrust, so that if one “of the families stole a hog, cow or sheep from the master” they had to conceal it, or eat the contraband in a friend’s home, “for fear of being betrayed by the other family.” Stroyer knew one slave who stole and butchered a hog, only to be “seen by some one of the other family” he lived with, with whom he did not get along, so the other family told their overseer, and the thief was

⁵⁰⁹ Eugene D. Genovese *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, 607

⁵¹⁰ Jacob Stroyer in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) 63-64

⁵¹¹ See for example Sella Martin in John Blassingame *Slave Testimony* (1998) 702, 709-712; Henry Bibb from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin’ On Ole Massa* (1969)

flogged. As revenge, the man “killed another hog” two months later concealed the carcass amidst the traitorous family’s belongings. He proceeded to tell the overseer, who now whipped the *other* man for supposedly being a thief.⁵¹² This revenge functioned not only to physically punish the slave for having informed on him, it also served to potentially damage the trust the overseer had in the man who “betrayed” his neighbor.

But enslaved people did not only use revenge to address trust issues that arose amongst members of the slave community. According to Stroyer “The slaves had three ways of detecting thieves” or dishonesty, one using a bible or “sieve,” and another that required “graveyard dust.” In the first ritual, if someone in the slave community was believed to have stolen something from another slave a bible (or a sieve, if there was no bible available) was suspended from a string, and carried by one of four men who would come to each cabin in the slave quarters and accuse the head of household of the theft. If the object “was to turn around on the string” then “that would be proof” that the man in question was guilty. Stroyer noted that this performance “was repeated three times” at each cabin for accuracy, and thus could sometimes take “a month” to exonerate the enslaved residents of a large plantation if the perpetrator was not quickly identified.⁵¹³ Stroyer claims that if the bible or sieve turned and the accused person did not confess, the defendant was required to admit to anything he had stolen “previously...or that he had thought of stealing at the time when the chicken or the dress was stolen.”⁵¹⁴ In this way the ritual sought to address a particular theft, it attempted to solve other cases, and it was even used to identify (and perhaps in turn prevent) deceitful “thought(s).”

⁵¹² Jacob Stroyer in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) 42-43

⁵¹³ Ibid, 57

⁵¹⁴ Ibid, 58

The last method “of detecting thieves was taught by the fathers and mothers of slaves.” According to Jacob Stroyer, since slaves in his community believed that a person had to go to the grave honest to avoid damnation, “graveyard dust” was seen as the “truest” substance to use in rituals for “detecting thieves.” He described how “dust would be taken from the grave of a person who had died” recently and “put into a bottle with water.” Those accused of stealing would be told that if they were innocent then they could drink the water without harm, but if they *had* committed the crime in question they should not drink from the bottle, or else risk dying and being “burned in fire and brimstone.” At this point, Stroyer explains that if the accused person was indeed the thief they would admit “it rather than take the water.” As punishment, if someone was found guilty of stealing chickens for example, they had to pay damages to their victim, providing four chickens for every bird taken, and if they could not repay the debt they had to swear never to steal in the future.⁵¹⁵ While Genovese focuses on theft by slaves, this is an excellent case of how enslaved people worked to root out deceit in their communities, even if it took an entire month to determine who was guilty of the crime. The lengths enslaved people were willing to go to is evidence of how seriously slaves took these transgressions, and how committed they were to uncovering the truth, preventing future theft and mitigating distrust within the community.⁵¹⁶

These rituals seem at odds with the popular perception that slaves could not trust one another. Perhaps this is simply because the practices meant to identify and expunge theft and dishonesty from within the slave quarters were concealed from those outside the enslaved community. In his discussion of the role of trust in performances Erving

⁵¹⁵ Ibid, 58-59

⁵¹⁶ Of course, as Stroyer notes that “these customs” were only used “among the negroes for their own benefit, for they did not consider it stealing when they took anything from their master.” Ibid, 59

Goffman argues that “When a member of a team makes a mistake in the presence” of others then “the other team members must suppress their immediate desire to punish and instruct the offender until” the outsiders are “no longer present.”⁵¹⁷ Since slaveholders stood to benefit from slaves informing on one another enslaved people may have made a concerted effort to keep them deliberately ignorant of any practices that sought to weed out deception and trust amongst slaves.

Frederick Douglass’s narratives suggested that trusting other slaves was not only possible, but also integral to surviving slavery. Though Douglass spoke of how enslaved people sometimes betrayed their fellow bondsmen, he also seemed intent on arguing that trust flourished amongst slaves. In his second autobiography Douglass went into great detail discussing the slaves he bonded with during the year he was hired out together. With these friends he knew “happiness,” remarking that he had “never loved, esteemed, or confided in men, more than I did in these.” Douglass was clear that these relationships were so strong because they were “true,” and founded on trust. He refuted claims that distrust was rife in slave communities, observing that though people often “charge slaves with great treachery toward each other, and to believe them incapable of confiding in each other,” this was not his experience, for his enslaved friends “were as true as steel.” As a result of the trust and affection that united this “band of brothers” in bondage Douglass claimed that no one took “advantage...of each other; as is sometimes the case where slaves are situated as we were” and there was “no tattling” to their master. Douglass does not say what came first, friendship or trust, so it is not clear exactly how these men were able to defy the odds and unite rather than be divided by informing. It seems that these bonds of confidence not only brought as much joy to Douglass as was

⁵¹⁷ Erving Goffman *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) 89

possible under the circumstances; it also enabled the men to contemplate escape together.⁵¹⁸ Once again the stakes of trust were thrown into sharp relief, no less than love and revolution were possible when slaves could come together without mistrust.

Nowhere was the complicated relationship of trust between slaves more evident than in the relationship between Douglass and an enslaved man named “Sandy.” Douglass recalled that after running away from Covey Sandy took Douglass into his home even though if his complicity had been discovered Sandy “would have suffered the penalty of thirty-nine lashes on his bare back, if not something worse.” “But,” Douglass claimed, “Sandy was too generous to permit the fear of punishment” to keep him from helping a “brother bondman.”⁵¹⁹ In this passage Douglass revealed his gratitude to Sandy, but also subtly highlighted how trustworthy Sandy was, and how much some slaves were willing to risk assisting other enslaved people.

Perhaps because Sandy had proven himself as a confidante before, when Douglass and other slaves on Thomas Auld’s plantation contemplated running away together, they invited Sandy to join them. As the plan developed however, he decided not to run away, and before long, their plot was revealed. Because Douglass and his other conspirators trusted each other so much, it was all the more shocking when it became clear that someone had divulged their plans. While they might obviously have suspected one another of being the informer Douglass swears that their “confidence in each other was unshaken,” though they were dedicated to discovering “who had betrayed us.” Protesting the accusations of guilt, and arguing that they had not yet run away, Douglass demanded to know what proof Auld had of their supposed plot in an effort to emphasize their

⁵¹⁸ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom* (2003 [1855]) 196-197

⁵¹⁹ Douglass devoted much more space to discussing Sandy in this second autobiography, perhaps because the relationship was so fraught with love and betrayal. *Ibid*, 173

supposed innocence, and in a bid to learn who was the traitor. Douglass ruefully noted that “Several circumstances seemed to point SANDY out, as our betrayer,” since he knew their designs but had “withdraw(n)” from them. In spite of this, Douglass claimed that he and his fellow conspirators “loved” Sandy “too well to think it *possible* that he could have betrayed us. So we rolled the guilt on other shoulders.”⁵²⁰ Though it was obvious that someone had informed their master of their plans, possibly a fellow slave, Douglass still expressed shock at learning that it was probably Sandy, as evidenced by his use of capital letters to proclaim the suspect. Trudy Govier might attribute this disbelief to the way that trust accrues interest over time. Govier explains that if one learns “that a trusted friend has been disloyal, callous, or cruel, we will not at first be inclined to take the story at face value.” By contrast, if one is told “such things about someone we distrust, we are likely to believe them and to regard them as manifestations of serious flaws of character.”⁵²¹ Douglass and his fellow conspirators not only trusted Sandy, this confidence was resilient enough to make the accusations, not Sandy, seem incredible. Once more, Douglass emphasized that enslaved people labored to build trust rather than mistrust by stressing the disbelief that he and the others felt, and their unwillingness to condemn someone who had been trustworthy in the past. This suggests that slavery may have kindled betrayal, but it also forged intense and lasting bonds of confidence, which, once established, could be difficult to breach.

Concerns about being betrayed by one’s own allies may have led many slaves to flee slavery on their own. But even enslaved people who contemplated running away alone were sometimes faced with the question of whether or not to trust other slaves or

⁵²⁰ Ibid, 217

⁵²¹ Trudy Govier *Social Trust and Human Communities*, 4-5

white people in order to escape. When Solomon Northup settled on the idea of trying to regain his freedom by writing to his former associates in the North, he had to find a white person who could safely deliver the letter. After “Carefully deliberating” Northup initially asked his white neighbor Armsby to send the letter without telling him the letter’s contents, “for I had fears that he might betray me.” Perhaps because of these fears Northup also decided to pay Armsby for his services, observing that the man might need “some inducement...of a pecuniary nature, before it would be safe to confide in him.” But Armsby revealed to Northup’s master that one of his slaves had asked him to mail a letter for him, leaving Northup despondent, and uncertain about how to be trustful in the future.⁵²² This highlighted how much “deliberating” could go into deciding whether to trust a white person or not. It also suggests that though he thought the money would buy the man’s trust it may only have kindled Armsby’s suspicions. Sociologist Trudy Govier notes that money can be used “to address certain problems of trust, but then the very use of money presupposes that certain other problems of trust have been solved.” In a word, money could accompany trust, but not necessarily forge it or replace it.⁵²³

Though Northup felt hopeless after Armsby’s betrayal he was able to use the breach of confidence as a learning experience. Later that summer, a man named Bass, who was avowedly opposed to slavery, came to stay at the Epps plantation. Northup watched the man closely, and “The more I saw of him, the more I became convinced he was a man in whom I could confide,” but his “previous ill-fortune” with Armsby “had taught me to be extremely cautious.” Even when he identified a man who had come to visit Northup’s owner, Epps, as one who exhibited anti-slavery sentiments, he took his

⁵²² Solomon Northup from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin’ On Ole Massa* (1969) 353

⁵²³ Trudy Govier *Social Trust and Human Communities*, 27

time to decide whether the man was thoroughly trustworthy or not. One day, when the two were alone, Northup broached the subject of being from New York. He confessed to Bass that he had “no friends...that I can put confidence in,” and that he was “afraid” to reveal his story to Bass, though he did not “believe” that Bass “would tell Master Epps.” Bass promised Northup “he would keep every word I might speak to him a profound secret,” providing Northup was many “assurances...that I should not be betrayed.” Northup told Bass the names of men who might recall him and help him, and once Northup “could no longer doubt” Bass’s “fidelity,” he “freely spoke to him of the many sorrows” Northup “had borne in silence.” Eventually the man assisted him by taking a letter North to confidants of Northrup’s, which set into motion his eventual emancipation.⁵²⁴ This suggests that while Bass’s anti-slavery sentiments were a clue that he might be trusted to help a slave that what mattered most in this equation was the time Northup spent observing the man, coupled with the man’s “assurances.”⁵²⁵ Of course once again, this insinuates that the eyes could be used to discern someone’s true character.

Enslaved people also had to decide whether or not to trust other slaves with their plan to run away. During one escape attempt Sella Martin fled to the plantation where his mother lived, but another slave saw him creeping through the slave quarters. Having been caught at night in a risky position Martin hazarded his luck once more by confiding in the stranger that he was a runaway, and that he was afraid “of being discovered” while trying to find his mother. Martin recalled that the man seemed “cold” in “manner,” but the man

⁵²⁴ Solomon Northup from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa* (1969) 374-377

⁵²⁵ Erving Goffman suggests that time is crucial to forging trust between people. In established relationships the rules and practices of situated interactions are not only based on individual conversations, but on a wider set of data collected through interactions and observations over time. Erving Goffman *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) 16,

agreed to bring Martin's mother to him. Waiting in the dark for the man to return Martin wrote that "it was an age of anxiety," as he wondered if the slave had "gone to betray me." Martin found himself thinking that the man had been gone "long, he must be informing his master." But to quell his apprehension during his seemingly interminable wait Martin reminded himself of the man's "cold, honest way" which made him believe that the slave "was not a traitor." Indeed, the man returned with his mother, and the two were reunited for several hours.⁵²⁶ Having been betrayed before, and with so much at stake, it is little wonder that Martin worried that the man was "informing" on him. Faced with the option of trusting the man or running without seeing his mother Martin told himself that since he had correctly read the man's character, and thus could be trusted. Nevertheless, his concerns while waiting show that enslaved people knew all too well the dangers of trusting a fellow slave, and that for, the stakes were worth the risk.

Those who did betray fellow runaway slaves were seemingly reviled. Jacob Stroyer claimed that when fugitives were "spotted" by slaves who were known informants then, "if the runaway slaves got a chance," they "would mob or kill" the would-be traitors. Stroyer was also quick to point out that runaways often "met those whom they could trust" who aided them in their flight.⁵²⁷ Henry Bibb revealed his aversion to traitors, and how such informers were recruited, after he was captured running away. Because he was a notorious run-away the local slaveholders interrogated Bibb about the "whereabouts" of other escaped slaves. He agreed to supply them with information, provided that they reveal who had "betrayed me into their hands." He learned that it was two men of color he met in Cincinnati who were paid to befriend and

⁵²⁶ Sella Martin in John Blassingame *Slave Testimony* (1998) 715-716

⁵²⁷ Jacob Stroyer in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) 63-64

then “betray...fugitive slaves for the reward offered.” The slaveholders offered him similar work, promising to pay him enough to secure his family’s freedom if he would help identify and catch other runaway slaves. Bibb claimed that he would “Never...consent to betray a fellow man like myself back into bondage.” He emphasized his reluctance to play the role of traitor, declaring that though he cherished his family and longed for them to be free, he was “unwilling” to obtain freedom “by betraying and destroying the liberty and happiness of others who have never offended me.”⁵²⁸ Though Stroyer and Bibb both conceded that there were those who were all too willing to betray their fellow slaves they also emphasized that many slaves would not agree to serve as turncoats.

These passages highlight the extent to which trust was contingent on space, and the ability to move freely through space hinged on being trustworthy. Enslaved people were well aware that how much their master trusted them could seemingly be measured by the distance and frequency with which they were allowed to travel from their master’s home. As Sella Martin learned, though his master generally had confidence in him he refused Martin’s request to visit his mother sixty miles away, so “he would not trust me to go alone.”⁵²⁹ Clearly masters could quantify how much they trusted their slaves by the amount of miles they could travel alone, and Martin’s owner did not “trust” him far enough. Harriet Jacob’s brother William was all too aware of how being (or at least seeming) trustworthy could lead to increased mobility, and thereby facilitate escape. William’s master repeatedly praised him for being “faithful,” and for not running away as

⁵²⁸ Henry Bibb from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa* (1969) 93-94

⁵²⁹ Sella Martin in John Blassingame *Slave Testimony* (1998) 712-713

they traveled through free states.⁵³⁰ William relied on this shored-up trust during their tour of the North, when he left their hotel the morning of their departure carrying his luggage. When his master “asked him where he was going” William claimed that he was going out to trade his “old trunk” for a new one. His master did not question this errand, and since the trunk “was rather shabby” he even offered William money to purchase a new one. According to the slaveholder William “thanked” him, but declined, and left. Little did his master know that the “shabby” trunk was filled with William’s clothes, packed so that he could escape in plain sight.⁵³¹

Other slaves’ narratives show that enslaved people who were considered untrustworthy were particularly aware of the greater mobility permitted to faithful slaves, and that some saw this freedom as reason enough to at least perform the semblance of loyalty. Frederick Douglass observed that “A slave who is considered trust-worthy” could persuade their master to hire them out, permitting them to leave their master’s home to work. In return for giving their master the wages they earned, “at the end of each week” the slave could usually “dispose of his time as he likes.” Slaves who were trusted were able to use this time to earn more money, raise crops, or spend time with loved ones. Unfortunately, Douglass admitted ruefully that he “was far from being a trust-worthy slave.”⁵³² But if being trusted could give an enslaved person a modicum of control over

⁵³⁰ Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 110-112

⁵³¹ William later told his sister that he refused his master’s money in part because he was “scrupulous about taking any money from his master on false pretences.” In order to “pay for his passage to Boston” William “sold his best clothes” rather than rob from his master, or even take money he was offered. Though he would steal himself, he wanted, as much as possible, to show that he was *not* deceitful, or unworthy of trust.) Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 112

⁵³² Josiah Henson *had* earned the reputation of being a “trust-worthy slave” over the years, so he was able to do exactly what Douglass described, getting the confidence of his master in order to gain the mobility necessary to travel as a preacher, which earned him the money to buy his freedom. Josiah Henson *The life of Josiah Henson: formerly a slave, now an inhabitant of Canada*, 1849, 28-30; Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom* (2003 [1855]) 237-238

the terms of their labor then diligent work could provide the means to being perceived as trustworthy. When Douglass realized that his “insolent answers” and “sulky deportment” were raising his master’s “suspicion that I might be cherishing disloyal purposes” Douglass threw himself into “working steadily” in the hopes that this would “remove suspicion.” Douglass claimed he “succeeded admirably” at doing so, masking his “disloyal purposes” with cheery industriousness, convincing his master that he “was never better satisfied” when in reality he “was planning...escape.”⁵³³ While loyal and obedient slaves might be rewarded with mobility, it was slaves with less trustworthy intentions that could use that extra time and freedom to great advantage.

Mobility was linked to trustworthiness and loyalty in part because of concerns about how to trust strangers. As Haltunnen argues, in the “treacherous city...character had to be assessed quickly within relatively fleeting relationships.”⁵³⁴ But this was not only a concern in urban settings. Slaveholders and slaves developed a variety of methods for discerning and concealing deceit and disloyalty in their daily interactions, but beyond the plantation, different tactics for establishing trust were necessary. While a slaveholder might learn through time and observation which slaves could be trusted, in the streets and public places of the Antebellum South all people of color were assumed to be slaves, and suspected of being runaways.⁵³⁵ But members of the planter class also faced a dilemma: how to win the trust of a person of color they did not know (who was possibly a fugitive).

⁵³³ Feigning happiness to conceal dissatisfaction may have been a common tactic, as Henry Bibb noted that one of his escapes was made possible when he “pretended to be satisfied for the purpose of getting an opportunity of giving them the slip.” Henry Bibb from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin’ On Ole Massa* (1969) 95; Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom* (2003 [1855]) 242

⁵³⁴ Karen Haltunnen *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830 - 1870*, 51

⁵³⁵ This is most evident in descriptions of how white people addressed any person of color they encountered alone on a street or road. For example, see Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom*, 574 and Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, 30

This changed how slaveholders tried to extract truth from people of color they encountered, and influenced whether slaves (especially runaways) decided to lie or not to the strangers they met. Perhaps aware of this, even before James W.C. Pennington got caught trying to run away, he agonized over what to tell anyone who might stop him on the road. He knew that if he admitted he was a fugitive then he would be swiftly returned to his master and severely whipped or sold to the Deep South. Hoping to avoid those fates, he realized his remaining options were to remain silent, or to “tell an untruth.” Pennington decided upon the latter, so when he was apprehended by several white men he “resolved...to insist that I was free.” They did not believe him however, so they bound him, and set out to find a local magistrate to hear his case.

As they traveled, they employed several ploys to obtain the truth from Pennington, ranging from inducements to threats, in an effort to gain his confidence, or at least determine if he could be trusted. When they saw that Pennington was having difficulty traveling the rough terrain with his hands tied, they unbound him, perhaps hoping this small act would earn his trust. He explained that after he was “untied...they began to parley,” as one of the men assured Pennington that if he had “run away from any one, it would be much better for you to tell us,” but Pennington, undaunted, swore that he was free.⁵³⁶ Clearly the men thought they were negotiating, and that the opportunity to admit to being a runaway in exchange for a vaguely “better” fate was an enticing proposition. However Pennington no doubt saw the offer for what it was, a thinly veiled threat of what would happen if he did not confess. This passage highlights how difficult it could be to establish trust between slaves and members of the plantocracy who had no knowledge of one another, and, more importantly, little leverage with one another. It also

⁵³⁶ James W.C. Pennington in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) 22-23

reveals how much the scripts slaves relied on to perform trustworthiness depended on familiarity.

With so much mistrust hanging over interactions between people of color and white people in the liminal spaces outside of plantations, how could a runaway slave obtain the trust that might take a lifetime of ostensibly faithful labor to accrue? As Sella Martin tried to reach freedom first by traveling by steamboat up the Mississippi, then by railway out of Cairo, Illinois, he discovered that trustworthy actions could function as currency, even in a land of strangers. Martin described how he encountered a “Californian” on the steamboat whose friends “were being cheated out of their money by cardsharps” early in the trip. Martin told the man about the con men before his friends lost more money, and as a result of this altruistic act the stranger “felt kindly towards” Martin. Luckily for Martin, he ran into this man in the Cairo railway station after he was told that a person of color could not buy a rail ticket unless someone could “vouch for their freedom.” The “Californian” took Martin aside and “asked seriously if I were free.” Martin replied that he was, and showed him some free papers he had falsely obtained, and the man proceeded to buy him a train ticket. As a result, “on the 6th day of January, 1856” Martin “became a Free man.”⁵³⁷

Because it was difficult to establish confidence between strangers runaway slaves faced particular trust challenges in their flight. Nothing illustrates this process better than the moments in slave narratives when fugitive slaves were forced to confide in or rely on others in order to escape slavery. The stakes were high; for many slaves secrecy was imperative, so confiding in someone might lead to freedom, or right back to slavery. Because of what they were risking, and because of the caution with which many authors

⁵³⁷ Sella Martin in John Blassingame *Slave Testimony* (1998) 733-734

approached escape, these scenes provide insight into the mechanisms of how slaves determined if someone was trustworthy. These scenes not only highlight the crucial moment of whether to trust someone or not, they shed light on how enslaved people ascertained the trustworthiness of others. William Wells Brown had to overcome feelings of mistrust in order to effect his escape, when, after a night in the cold, he decided to seek help. He initially hoped to “seek protection” from “some colored person, or, if not, someone who was not a slaveholder: for I had an idea that I should know a slaveholder as far as I could see him.” Brown hid when a man approached who “looked too genteel for me to hail him,” and eventually flagged down another white man who passed by only after discerning from his less “genteel” appearance that he was “the man that I have been looking for.”⁵³⁸ His gamble paid off, as the man was a Quaker, who was willing to conceal him in his house. Brown’s actions hinted that away from the plantation slaves would consider trusting those who were not of the planter class, which they believed could be ascertained from visual signifiers.

Slave narratives also show how deeply ingrained their mistrust was, as even slaves who escaped slavery prior to the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act were wary of people in the North, especially whites. While on the boat that would take her to freedom, Harriet Jacobs remained “suspicious” of the white captain of the ship. He recognized this, and told Jacob’s that “he was sorry” that she “had so little confidence in him” even so close to the end of their journey. Jacobs remarked, “Ah, if he had ever been a slave he

⁵³⁸ James W.C. Pennington also experienced the moment of judgment when he had to decide whether or not to trust a Quaker man that a neighbor had directed him to go see. Though in the free state of Pennsylvania he was understandably still wary of strangers. But when the man offered him food and shelter this “simple sincerity” from “a stranger” was deeply moving to Pennington, whose “fear subsided.” As a result, the Quaker won Pennington’s “confidence; and I felt that I might confide to him a fact which I had, as yet, confided to no one”: the fact that he was a fugitive. James W.C. Pennington in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) 41; William Wells Brown in Gilbert Osofsky, ed., *Puttin’ On Ole Massa* (1969), 218-219

would have known how difficult it was to trust a white man.”⁵³⁹ Ellen Craft may have been feeling similar suspicions once the Crafts reached Philadelphia, and were taken in by a Philadelphia Quaker, named Barkley Ivens. William claimed that Ellen was initially at ease with Ivens because he “was not of the fairest complexion,” so Ellen concluded that he was also of mixed racial descent. When she realized that they were staying with a family of white people William tried to dispel her concerns, but she responded that she had no “confidence whatever in white people” because she believed that they were “only trying to get us back to slavery.” Eventually she was reassured by Ivens and her husband, and William noted that “from that day she firmly believed that there are good and bad persons of every shade of complexion.”⁵⁴⁰ This scene suggests that for those who had been inculcated into the emotional hierarchies of slavery as enslaved people, it was difficult to believe that whites might be trusted. Other fugitives were even less trusting. While recounting the rush of mixed emotions that he experienced upon reaching freedom in New York, Frederick Douglass noted that “The motto which I adopted when I started from slavery was this – ‘Trust no man!’ I saw in every white man an enemy, and in almost every colored man cause for distrust.” Douglass still feared that any white person and “almost every” person of color might give away his plans.⁵⁴¹ That Jacobs, the Crafts and Douglass would be so wary and distrusting of those they met in free states, even before the Fugitive Slave Act was passed, suggests the extent to which the slave system thrived from inculcating enslaved people with mistrust.

⁵³⁹Jacobs’ observation delineates the sexual politics of this conflict around trust. After her experiences with Dr. Flint it is little wonder that she noted that slavery had left her with a distrust of white *men*. Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 131

⁵⁴⁰ *ibid*, pp. 83-85

⁵⁴¹ Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, 93

Far beyond the boundaries of the plantation the legacy of the perception that enslaved people were deceitful was starkly evident in the texts of slave narratives, in the way the authors argued that they had been “faithful” or “loyal” slaves.⁵⁴² It was equally clear in the impassioned defenses former slaves gave for any lies they had told in bondage. Henry Bibb and Harriet Jacobs used identical rationalizations, saying that “deception” or “cunning” were “the only weapon” available to enslaved people.⁵⁴³ In spite of the way that they framed lying as a justifiable tool for the dispossessed, Jacobs also wrote that she hated being dishonest; forced to lie once she reached New York as a fugitive, she observed ruefully that she was “reluctant to resort to subterfuges.” Once more however she attributed her deceit to slavery, rather than to any failing of moral character, declaring that “So far as my ways have been crooked, I charge them all upon slavery. It was that system of violence and wrong which now left me no alternative but to enact a falsehood.”⁵⁴⁴ Though she believed she had every right to employ “cunning” to resist slavery she also valued her reputation as an honest person and a credible author.

The number of slave narratives that include authenticating documents in the introductions or conclusions, often by white editors or authors, are further indications that the word of slave narrators needed to be substantiated. As a result, many authors like Henry Bibb excerpted letters from white acquaintances or other documents to

⁵⁴² See for example William Wells Brown from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa* (1969) 207; Moses Grandy in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) 34; Solomon Northup from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa* (1969) 280, 282; Josiah Henson *The life of Josiah Henson: formerly a slave, now an inhabitant of Canada*, 5, 19; James W.C. Pennington in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) 8; Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 110-112

⁵⁴³ Bibb explained that “the only weapon of self-defense that I could use successfully was that of deception,” which he later referred to as “the most effective defense a slave can use,” while Jacobs claimed that “cunning” was “the only weapon of the weak and oppressed against the strength of tyrants.” Henry Bibb from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa* (1969) 66, 95; Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 85

⁵⁴⁴ Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 137

“corroborate” their “statements.”⁵⁴⁵ Moses Grandy’s narrative was introduced by George Thompson, who described Grandy’s “unsurpassed faithfulness,” before recalling how he first “listened” to Grandy’s “artless tale with entire confidence.” In this way Thompson assured the reader that he trusted Grandy, while also insinuating that Grandy was incapable of guile, as revealed by his seemingly “artless tale.”⁵⁴⁶ Though the reader would not have the chance to hear Grandy himself recount his experience of having thrice bought and twice-denied his freedom, they could now proceed to read his story “with entire confidence” that it was true. Solomon Northup defended his own authorial integrity, beginning his text by explaining to this reader that his goal was “to give a candid and truthful statement of facts,” to tell his “story...without exaggeration,” allowing the reader to decide “whether even the pages of fiction present a picture of more cruel wrong or a severer bondage.”⁵⁴⁷

The belief that people of color could not be trusted had far-reaching impacts for former slaves. After Lunsford Lane was manumitted, but trying to get permission to stay in his native North Carolina to purchase his family, he had to get letters from white people, attesting to his character. One man, known to him through his former master, wrote an 1840 letter describing Lane as "prompt, obedient and faithful." The man also wrote a petition to the "Hon, General Assembly of the State of North Carolina," in which

⁵⁴⁵ Henry Bibb from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa* (1969) 153. See also affidavits in Solomon Northup from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa* (1969) 388

⁵⁴⁶ The review of Harriet Jacob’s narrative in the *Anti-Slavery Advocate* launched a similar defense of her “truthfulness and integrity.” The *Anti-Slavery Advocate* quoted in Joanne M. Braxton “Harriet Jacobs’ ‘Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl’: The Re-Definition of the Slave Narrative Genre” *The Massachusetts Review* 27-2 (Summer, 1986) 383; Moses Grandy in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) iii-iv

⁵⁴⁷ In the same vein, Harriet Jacobs commenced the preface to her autobiography with the aside “Reader, be assured this narrative is no fiction.” Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 2; Solomon Northup from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa* (1969) 227

he spouted similar praise of Lane's fidelity.⁵⁴⁸ In order to thrive as a free person of color in the South one still had to be able to prove their trustworthiness and loyalty to members of the planter class. These letters, more than anything, highlight the value white people in the Antebellum South placed on trust, and the anxieties they harbored about slaves that could not be made faithful. The ramifications of these fears would be felt for generations to come. Eugene Genovese argues that over time the idea that slaves were prone to lie was "attributed...to their being black rather than to being slaves."⁵⁴⁹

Ultimately the battle to ensure that slaves were trustworthy and sincere had always been rooted in slaveholders' efforts to stave off their fears about what their slaves truly felt, and what disloyal slaves might do. In his 1964 book *Trust and Power* sociologist Niklas Luhman theorized that people rely so fervently on trust because by "trusting" one another "we assume that an indefinitely large range of harmful and dangerous things will not happen." Furthermore, Luhman claimed that by "trusting" others "we are able to reduce the complexity of the world because we do not have to take every possibility into account"⁵⁵⁰ This affective blissful ignorance may have brought temporary and tenuous comfort to slaveholders, but it was of little use their slaves. Faced with the option of seeking benefits (that may or may not ever materialize) from being trusted, or to be seen as a disloyal threat, some enslaved people decided to be, or at least seem trustworthy. Rather than assuage slaveholders' fears of deceit and infidelity other slaves elected to exploit the fears of the planter class, and in doing so, emphasize the impossibility of permanent trust in a society rooted in inequity.

⁵⁴⁸ Under North Carolina law freed slaves were required to leave the state within twenty-one days of being manumitted. Lunsford Lane in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) 27, 29-30

⁵⁴⁹ Eugene D. Genovese *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (1976) 609-610

⁵⁵⁰ Trudy Govier *Social Trust and Human Communities*, 25

Chapter Five:

“He wouldn’t whip, He’d punish”: Affective Discipline in the Antebellum South

"The whip, the cowskin, the gallow, the stocks, the paddle, the prison... although bloody and barbarous in their nature - have no comparison with those internal pangs which are felt by the soul when the hand of the merciless tyrant plucks from one's bosom the object of one's ripened affections." – Henry “Box” Brown ⁵⁵¹

After a plot to run away with several of his friends failed, his fellow slaves were freed, but Frederick Douglass found himself alone in a jail cell, imprisoned as the supposed head conspirator. Douglass described how he felt during this lonesome incarceration period, remarking that “Thirty-nine lashes on my naked and bleeding back, would have been joyfully borne, in preference to this separation from these, the friends of my youth.”⁵⁵² Douglass’s moving passage suggests that the “lash” of the whip was not the only way to punish an enslaved person; there were also a variety of ways that slaveholders could emotionally discipline slaves. Furthermore, Douglass posited that physical correction was preferable to affective modes of control.

Historical and literary accounts of Antebellum American slavery often focus on the physical brutality of the institution. Even historians who address how enslaved people were punished generally argue that slaves were only punished corporally, primarily with the whip, ignoring the affective motives and goals of punishing slaves. Instead, I am interested in the affective violence of slavery. I argue that concentrating on the physical violence used to maintain slavery ignores the many other methods with which slavery

⁵⁵¹ Henry “Box” Brown *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown*, 3,4

⁵⁵² Frederick Douglass frequently differentiated between physical and emotional or mental abuse, and argued that the latter was far more brutal or intolerable, observing of his time in slavery that “my troubles from the beginning, have been less physical than mental.” Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 107, 161-62, 219, 237

was policed and enforced, through emotional discipline and affective manipulation. Attention to physical resistance to slavery also belies the wealth of ways that enslaved people responded to bondage and emotional discipline with their own affective tools. I am not denying the physical violence of slavery, nor the many forms of corporeal punishment used to maintain the institution, rather I seek to broaden understandings of how emotions functioned as a means and an ends to punishment for slaveholders. Doing so will challenge notions about what methods were used to punish enslaved people, examine the crucial role emotions played in punishment, how and when slaveholders employed affective control, and how slaves responded to such forms of discipline.

In the myriad interactions that took place between slaveholders and slaves emotions were both the subject and object of affective resistance and discipline. Enslaved people faced punishment, physical or emotional, if they were perceived to be feeling or expressing the wrong sentiments. The narratives of former slaves are full of accounts of enslaved people who were whipped for seeming proud, “insolent,” or untrustworthy, or even sold for grieving too long over the death or sale of a spouse or child. Slaveholders not only sought to punish by influencing their slaves’ feelings, they also disciplined their slaves through *their own* affective expressions and behavior.

Historians writing about slavery have long focused on the physical modes of punishment used to discipline slaves, in particular, the whip, at the cost of any discussion of affective modes of correction. In his work on the history of punishment in America Lawrence Meir Friedman argued that “punishment on the plantation was essentially, *physical* punishment,” with the whip serving as the chosen “correctional instrument of all

purpose.”⁵⁵³ Some authors even go so far as to deny that affective modes of correction existed. In an essay on the relationship between race, gender and punishment Vernetta D. Young and Zoe Spencer claimed that “noncorporeal punishments typically were not used” to punish slaves, because it “would have been both futile and counterproductive” to try to humiliate enslaved people, who were already thoroughly inculcated with “stereotypes about their inferiority.”⁵⁵⁴ By arguing that enslaved people were too degraded by slavery to feel shame Young and Spencer perpetuated the claim of some members of the planter class that enslaved people were insensible to emotions, and thus could only be physically corrected. In contrast to this elision in scholarship the writing of slaveholders and slaves alike reveals that slaveholders wielded a number of affective punishments in order to control their slaves and their own emotions.

Like Frederick Douglass, many former slaves spoke of the emotional abuse of slavery as a separate entity from the physical cruelty they endured, and claimed that affective punishments could cut more keenly than corporeal ones. Elizabeth Keckley described the “heart and soul tortures” that enslaved people endured.⁵⁵⁵ Henry “Box” Brown wrote at length about the multitude of physical, emotional and mental “cruelties”

⁵⁵³ This argument has been made by a number of authors. Vernetta D. Young and Zoe Spencer asserted that “The punishment of slaves was usually corporeal.” Some authors speak of there being a “variety of measures used to keep slaves in line” other than whipping, yet only go on to discuss physical forms of correction, listing branding, stocks and execution as other possible punishments. See for example Daniel E. Walker, *No More, No More: Slavery and Cultural Resistance in Havana and New Orleans* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Elizabeth Dale *Criminal Justice in the United States, 1789-1939* (Cambridge University Press, 2011); Vernetta D. Young and Zoe Spencer “Multiple Jeopardy: The Impact of Race, Gender, and Slavery on the Punishment of Women in Antebellum America” in Mary Bosworth and Jeanne Flavin eds. *Race, Gender and Punishment* (2006) 71; Lawrence Meir Friedman *Crime and Punishment in American History* (BasicBooks, New York, 1993) 85; See also Edward L. Ayers *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Eugene Genovese *Roll, Jordan, Roll*

⁵⁵⁴ Vernetta D. Young and Zoe Spencer “Multiple Jeopardy: The Impact of Race, Gender, and Slavery on the Punishment of Women in Antebellum America” in Mary Bosworth and Jeanne Flavin eds. *Race, Gender and Punishment*(2007) 72

⁵⁵⁵ Elizabeth Keckley *Behind the Scenes in the Lincoln White House*, 29

that enslaved people were “continually subjected” to, but argued that what Keckley would call the “heart and soul tortures” were worse. He gave the example of how his mother was robbed of her children, observing that “this kind of torture is a thousand fold more cruel and barbarous than the use of the lash which lacerates the back.”⁵⁵⁶ Just how lasting emotional cruelty could be was evident in Fanny Kemble’s encounter with an enslaved woman named Judy, who recounted her tales of abuse at the hands of the plantation overseer, Mr. King. After refusing King’s sexual advances Judy recalled that he “flogged her severely for having resisted him, and then sent her off, as a further punishment, to Five Pound,” a separate “remote” property “where she claimed “slaves are sometimes banished.” Judy swore that as “bad as the flogging was, she would sooner have taken that again than the dreadful lonely days and nights she spent on the penal swamp of Five Pound.”⁵⁵⁷

Antebellum laws, along with letters, journals and plantation books reveal how concerned white Southerners were with finding effective ways to police and discipline the enslaved population.⁵⁵⁸ Even their slaves were aware of this obsession, as Jacob Stroyer dryly noted that “how to control negroes...was the principal topic of the poor white men South, in the days of slavery.”⁵⁵⁹ Slaveholders used a number of methods for controlling and correcting their slaves. But the writings of slaveholders and court cases

⁵⁵⁶ Similarly, Lunsford Lane decried the treatment of those still enslaved, describing the slave as “spirit-bruised” which he claimed was “worse than lash-mangled.” Lunsford Lane in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) 52; Henry Box Brown *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown*, 3, 4, 28

⁵⁵⁷ Frances Anne Kemble *Journal of a Residence On a Georgian Plantation*, 108

⁵⁵⁸ Advertisements in *DeBow’s* reveal the extent to which planters were concerned about controlling their slaves. For example, one book advertised in *DeBow’s* for a plantation account book by J.W. Randolph of Richmond, Virginia, touted its chapter on the “Rules for the Government and Discipline of the Negroes.” *DeBow’s Review* January 1853, Vol. XIV, No. 1, 92

⁵⁵⁹ Jacob Stroyer in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) 74-75

suggest that not all members of the planter class were in agreement about what types and amounts of punishment to employ.

Of course, corporeal punishment had many advocates amongst the planter class, and they trotted out a variety of justifications to defend their disciplinary practices to abolitionists as well as opponents of corporeal punishment. Some claimed that physical punishments were the only kind that would work on slaves. Many claimed that whipping was not a “cruel” or “harsh” form of punishment.⁵⁶⁰ One author writing in *De Bow’s* went so far as to surmise that after slaves were whipped they would “laugh” at any slaveholder who believed that “dat kind o’ lashin ebber hut nigga.”⁵⁶¹ Others countered accusations that whipping was cruel by pointing out that the same punishment was used to correct children and sailors in the Navy.⁵⁶² William Harper declared that beating a slave was “not degrading to a slave, nor is it felt to be so,” asking his reader “is it degrading to a child?”⁵⁶³

Interestingly, some members of the planter class touted physical discipline as a superior alternative to the affective forms of punishment. After arguing that “lashing” slaves did not “hurt” them, one author in *De Bow’s Review* claimed that a slave who received a whipping had a better fate than that of a free English criminal, who would be “imprison(ed)” and thus “banished from hearth and home, wife and children.”⁵⁶⁴ Like so many defenders of slavery, the author implied that slaves were better treated than free

⁵⁶⁰ Edward L. Ayers *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984) 101-102

⁵⁶¹ *DeBow’s Review* January 1853, Vol. XIV, No. 1, “Misery and Degradation of British Workmen- Slave Laws” 271

⁵⁶² Eugene Genovese *Roll, Jordan, Roll* 63

⁵⁶³ Of course, Harper acknowledged that “to submit to a blow, would be degrading to a freeman,” though it would not be “degrading” for a slave, any more than it would be for “a priest or a woman.” William Harper “Harper’s Memoir on Slavery” *The Pro-Slavery Argument*, 34, 51

⁵⁶⁴ *DeBow’s Review* January 1853, Vol. XIV, No. 1, “Misery and Degradation of British Workmen- Slave Laws” 271

workers in Britain (based on the supposed happiness of slaves and “misery” of British workers). But the author also insinuated that physical punishments like whippings were preferable to the emotional punishment of being separated from one’s family in prison, “banished from hearth and home.” A similar argument was made in verse, in a poem called “Negroes in the Field,” published in an 1850 *DeBow’s Review*. Originally included in a work by a British author entitled “Barbadoes,” the poem described slaves as happy to work, as evidenced by their frequent “jocund laughs” as they labored. As a result, the author posited that enslaved people:

“fear no lash, nor worse! The dungeon’s gloom,
Nor nurse the sorrows of a hopeless doom.”⁵⁶⁵

Not only was the poem perpetuating the myth that enslaved people were naturally happy, “free from sorrows,” and laughing as they work, it also insinuated that they were not afraid of punishment, corporeal, or “worse.” Most importantly, the poem provides insight into how planters viewed the hierarchy of discipline. The “gloom” of incarceration was deemed “worse” than whipping, implying that members of the planter class believed that affective discipline was harsher than corporeal correction. Of course, what pro-slavery authors said in defense of slavery did not always reflect the practices of slaveholders. In spite of these claims that whipping was not something to “fear,” and that affective modes of discipline such as imprisonment were “worse,” many slaveholders turned to emotional punishment to maintain control on their plantations.

According to Daniel Walker, while “some” slaveholders employed whipping “as the most common tool of coercion; others found different means” of disciplining and manipulating their slaves. Walker cites one former slave, Albert Patterson, who observed

⁵⁶⁵ *DeBow’s Review* Vol. VIII, 1850, “Song of the Cane Fields,” 68

that his master “wouldn’t whip, he’d punish.”⁵⁶⁶ I would argue that the difference between whipping and punishing may have been rooted in emotional discipline. Emotions were employed to control slaves in a number of ways. First, slaves were punished based on how their master was feeling. Second, slaves were disciplined for how they felt themselves. Finally, slaveholders used affective and physical modes of discipline to correct or punish slaves emotionally.

First and foremost, slaveholders were concerned about the role their own feelings played in disciplining slaves. The writings of slaveholders reveal that they believed emotions played an important role in discipline, and that they were concerned about this influence. In an article from *DeBow’s Review* entitled “Plantation Life—Duties and Responsibilities” the author, H.N. McTyeire, argued that emotions should play no part in debates over discipline, or in the actual punishment itself. First he decried “the mawkish sentimentalism” that fueled critiques of “corporal punishment.” He then advised his readers that a master must resort to such punishments only to achieve the “legitimate” goal of “correction and prevention.” As such, a master should not apply more than a corrective punishment, “for anger is fierce and wraith cruel.”⁵⁶⁷ McTyeire was clear that slaveholders should not discipline a slave in “anger,” lest they be overly “cruel.” He also condemned critics of physical punishment for allowing emotion, or “mawkish sentimentalism” to cloud their judgment about appropriate modes of correction. Almost a century prior Thomas Jefferson had offered similar advice, recommending that slaveholders, especially parents, should “restrain” their “passion towards his slave,”

⁵⁶⁶ Daniel E. Walker, *No More, No More: Slavery and Cultural Resistance in Havana and New Orleans* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004) 41

⁵⁶⁷ D. B. De Bow [The Editor], H. N. McTyeire “Plantation Life—Duties and Responsibilities,” *DeBow’s Review* 29-3 (September 1860) 361

especially in front of their children. He believed that all too often parents ignored this, giving free rein to their “storms” of “wrath.”⁵⁶⁸ The message was clear: to control one’s slaves a slaveholder needed to control their own emotions. Otherwise, a poem cautioned, “The passions” become “thy masters, thou the slaves.”⁵⁶⁹

The writings of former slaves also suggest that they were also disdainful of masters who whipped in anger. Charles Ball described one of his slave mistresses as “the worst woman I ever saw amongst the southern people,” in part because of the cruel beatings she doled out. He explained how the day she arrived on her husband’s newly built plantation she provided the slaves with insight into “her character” when she brutally whipped the enslaved woman charged with nursing her child when the baby “cried, and could not be kept silent.” Though the beating was intended to punish the enslaved nurse for permitting the child to cry, Ball believed that the act really revealed “that my mistress possessed no control over her passions.”⁵⁷⁰

Though planter’s prescriptive writing were clear that one ought not correct a slave in anger, slaveholders often ignored such advice in their daily practices. Court documents and writings by travelers and former slaves indicate that masters often beat their slaves out of anger, sometimes fatally. Frederick Law Olmsted recounted a tale of a Louisiana slave owner who went on trial at the parish court “for injuring one of his negroes.” A local man told Olmsted that the planter had feelings for an enslaved woman, but believed that she was showing affection to one of his male slaves. As a result, “in an anger of

⁵⁶⁸ Thomas Jefferson from “Notes on the State of Virginia” quoted by Thomas Roderick Dew in “Professor Dew on Slavery” in *The Pro-Slavery Argument*, 454-455

⁵⁶⁹ Genovese seems to believe that slaveholders took this to heart, engaging in a little word play to declare that “masters who were not slaves to their passions tried to hold corporeal punishment to a minimum.” Eugene Genovese *Roll, Jordan, Roll* 64; Commonplace Book, Forman-Bryan-Screven Collection, GHS, quoted in Catherine Clinton *The Plantation Mistress*, 66

⁵⁷⁰ Charles Ball *Fifty Years in Chains; or, the Life of An American Slave* (1859) 273, 27

jealousy” the planter “mutilated” his slave. Though the slaveholder was not convicted, the local gossip suggested that his neighbors “believe(d) he was guilty, and ought to have been punished” for “being jealous of the boy.”⁵⁷¹ Interestingly, the planter’s peers were more concerned about the slaveholder “being jealous” of a slave, than they were of the murder he had committed. Though masters might be discouraged from punishing their slaves in a fit of passion the law recognized that this occurred nevertheless, sometimes fatally. A law passed in South Carolina in 1821 stated that it was a felony to murder a slave, but noted that killing a slave “in sudden heat and passion is the same as manslaughter,” a lesser charge.⁵⁷² Laws like these, which existed throughout the Antebellum South, effectively decriminalized any affectively motivated murder or punishment.

Former slaves claimed that it was quite common for slaveholders to not only punish their slaves while they were upset, but to punish their slaves *because* they felt that way. Solomon Northup observed that slaves belonging to his master Epps were as likely to be punished for how Epps felt as for an actual offence. Northup claimed that Epps was frequently felled by “periods of ill-humor,” and during these moods a “trivial...cause was sufficient with him for resorting to the whip.”⁵⁷³ James W.C. Pennington also warned enslaved people about the ramifications of their master’s moods, observing that “To-day you may be pampered by his meekness, but to-morrow you will suffer in the storm of his

⁵⁷¹ Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom*, 277-278

⁵⁷² DeBow’s Review January 1853, Vol. XIV, No. 1, “Misery and Degradation of British Workmen- Slave Laws” 269

⁵⁷³ Solomon Northup in *Puttin’ On Ole Massa*, (1969) 364

passions.”⁵⁷⁴ Clearly enslaved people recognized just how dangerous a slaveholders “passions” could be.

Some slaves believed that slaveholders punished their slaves in order to exorcise their feelings through the whip. Jacob Stroyer described a local slaveholder, who became “fretful and peevish” when he was cheated out of a great deal of money by a business partner. His slaves were worried, not only because one in particular served as the “security” backing the investment, but because it was known that “slaveholders would revenge themselves on the slaves whenever they became angry.”⁵⁷⁵ Indeed, disciplining a disobedient slave was almost a balm for a slaveholder’s upset feelings. Sella Martin looked back on a conflict he had with his master during which Martin was “defiant.” Martin claimed that his insubordination “angered” his master “beyond his usual display of temper,” so “both as a gratification of his feelings and...to subdue me,” his master ordered him imprisoned.⁵⁷⁶ According to Martin his owner acted out of “anger,” choosing to punish Martin by incarcerating him, in order to “subdue” the rebellious Martin and soothe his own “feelings.”

Enslaved people were perhaps even more horrified by masters who turned to punishment not when they were angry, but because of the pleasure they derived from it. Frederick Douglass mentioned that his master Col. Lloyd was “delighted” by whipping an enslaved women, while Henry Bibb claimed that he “often heard” a particular slave driver declare that he would prefer to “paddle a female, than eat when he was hungry,”

⁵⁷⁴ James W.C. Pennington in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) viii

⁵⁷⁵ Jacob Stroyer in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) 28

⁵⁷⁶ Sella Martin in John Blassingame *Slave Testimony* (1998) 721

because “it was music for him to hear them scream, and to see their blood run.”⁵⁷⁷

Douglass noted that even whites who did not own slaves seemed to enjoy watching slaves be punished. He recalled that after his run-away plot was uncovered, and he and his fellow conspirators were captured, they were paraded before “crowds” of townsfolk who he deemed “allies” of slaveholders. According to Douglass they knew that the slaves’ plot had been revealed, and came to see the prisoners, “to feast their vindictive eyes on our misery, and to gloat over our ruin.”⁵⁷⁸ Clearly the punishment of slaves not only released anger, they produced desire, sadistic joy, and Schadenfreude for many Southern whites.

Jacob Stroyer insinuated that slaves not only feared emotionally fueled punishments, they saw them as foolish. Stroyer pointed out that disciplining in anger was dangerous for slaves, but also rash, and ultimately impractical and unprofitable for slaveholders. According to Stroyer, when masters employed slave hunters to track down fugitives some would demand that their slaves be returned “unbruised,” but others, “in a mad fit of passion, would say to them, ‘I want you to bring my runaway nigger home, dead or alive.’”⁵⁷⁹ Stroyer insinuated that crazed by “passion” slaveholders would demand corporeal punishment to sate their anger, while other planters would not allow their emotions to reign, and thereby cause them to lose an investment.

Frederick Douglass’s narrative suggested that slaveholders might have deliberately promoted the idea that they disciplined out of anger or rage, as part of a larger strategy for maintaining control on their plantations. According to Douglass, some

⁵⁷⁷ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom* (2003 [1855]) 67, 73; Henry Bibb in *Puttin’ On Ole Massa*, (1969) 115

⁵⁷⁸ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 215

⁵⁷⁹ Jacob Stroyer in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) 72

slaveholders worked to “convince” their slaves that their owners’ “wraith is far more terrible and boundless, and vastly more to be dreaded, than that of the underling overseer.” Douglass corroborated this, as he asserted that if a slaveholder let their “temper be stirred” and their “passions get loose” then “the slave-owner will go *far beyond* the overseer in cruelty.”⁵⁸⁰ Emphasizing his point Douglass contrasted the “delight” his master Lloyd took in whipping an enslaved women with the demeanor of the overseer, Mr. Sevier, who was perceived to “take no especial pleasure” in whipping slaves.⁵⁸¹ This implies that affective discipline was part of a wider network of punishments. Slaveholders used intermediaries (overseers in rural settings, jailors or police in cities) to whip slaves for minor crimes, but also to maintain the perception that masters themselves only whipped when overcome by emotions, which insured that their whippings went “*far beyond*” the dispassioned punishment of an overseer. This meant that slaves would not only be afraid of when their masters were angry, they would come to fear angering them as well. This also indicated that physical punishments were often used to affective ends, such as keeping slaves suspended in fear.

Some slaveholders used corporeal violence selectively, physically disciplining one slave in order to affectively control many. According to Frederick Douglass, it was “quite usual to make one slave the object of especial abuse, and to beat him often,” not because they believed that “the slave whipped will be improved by it,” but because of the whipping’s “effect upon others,” a practice Douglas called “mean” and “wicked.”⁵⁸² This

⁵⁸⁰ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom* (2003 [1855]) 65

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid*, 67, 73

⁵⁸² Daniel Walker identifies a similar practice in Havana, where some slaveholders would pay to have one or two of their slaves whipped each month, not for a specific crime, but to keep their other slaves from becoming “unmanageable.” Daniel E. Walker, *No More, No More* (2004) 28; Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 192

was sometimes done in a highly public forum, in order to maximize the number of slaves who were subjected to the spectacle of violence.⁵⁸³ Olmsted related a story he was told of a slaveholder “in Georgia or Alabama” who was bludgeoned to death by a slave. Olmsted learned that the slave was captured and “roasted” publically over “a slow fire, on the spot of the murder, in the presence of many thousand slaves” brought in “from all the adjoining counties” by their masters to witness the burning. Afterwards the slave’s ashes were “scattered to the winds and trampled underfoot,” and the enslaved people in attendance listened as “magistrates and clergymen addressed appropriate warnings to the assembled subjects.” Clearly the slave’s execution was intended as a spectacle, meant to scare the local enslaved population in order to deter them from killing their own masters. But the parable also revealed how scared members of the planter class were, as Olmsted’s storyteller remarked that “It was not thought indiscreet to leave doors open again that night.”⁵⁸⁴ Though members of the planter class had staged an elaborate ritual in order to frighten and intimidate the entire slave population, and hopefully ward off any would-be assassins in their midst, they clearly felt *less* safe afterwards if they felt the need to insure that “that night” their doors were locked.

A slave needn’t even kill a white person to be deemed a mortal threat to the affective order to the Slave South. Frederick Douglass described watching as a slave named Demby was shot dead in front of many slaves on the plantation because he had been deemed to have “become unmanageable” due to his disobedience. According to the

⁵⁸³ For more on the punitive use of spectacle, in particular public executions, see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage books, 1995); Michael S. Hindus, *Prisons and Plantation: Crime, Justice and Authority In Massachusetts and South Carolina, 1767-1878* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Lawrence Meir Friedman *Crime and Punishment in American History* (BasicBooks, New York, 1993)

⁵⁸⁴ Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom* (1996) 572 - 573

overseer Demby had to be killed, because “he had set a dangerous example to the other slaves,” for “if one slave refused to be corrected” and did not face the consequences “the other slaves would soon” follow suit, “the result of which would be, the freedom of the slaves, and the enslavement of the whites.”⁵⁸⁵ Thus Demby was murdered not only to teach the other slaves on the Auld plantation a lesson, but to stave off white fears of slave rebellions that would lead to the “enslavement of...whites.” Once again, slaves had to be punished for exerting influence over how slaveholders felt, in particular, fear.

But slaveholders were not only interested in the affective ends of punishment, but also in affective means of discipline. There were a number of reasons why a slaveholder might have sought out punishments that were not physical, or visible. Some masters and defenders of slavery worried about the negative effect physical discipline might have on the affective relations between slaveholders and slaves. According to Eugene Genovese, “a master who used his whip too often or with too much vigor risked their hatred.”⁵⁸⁶ But some planters also believed that too much physical discipline might emotionally damage a slave, or lead them to run away. Samuel Cartwright cautioned slaveholders against displaying cruelty towards their slaves or “frighten(ing) them by a blustering manner of approach,” claiming that a contented slave would not run away.⁵⁸⁷ A planter from Mississippi wrote a lengthy article in *De Bow’s Review* about his slaveholding practices, advising other planters how to reduce the number of whippings that were necessary, and achieve “the happiness of both master and servant.” In it, he outlined a number of

⁵⁸⁵ Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 33-34; Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom* (2003 [1855]) 93

⁵⁸⁶ Eugene Genovese *Roll, Jordan, Roll* 124-125

⁵⁸⁷ Of course, Cartwright undermined this point by conceding that a “frightened” slave would also not run away. Though Cartwright called for “kind” and “gracious” attitudes to enslaved people, he acknowledged that coercing a slave to feel fear would likely produce the same result: a slave who was not inclined to run away. Either way, the goal was to maintain affective control. Samuel Cartwright “Diseases and Peculiarities of the Negro Race,” *DeBow’s Review*, Vol. XI, 1851.

policies that he believed helped maintain his slaves' "comfort," "health," and "happiness," (as well as his own profit margin). He bragged that such policies insured that he had "as few sour looks and as little whipping as almost any other place of the same size."⁵⁸⁸ The planter clearly saw a direct relationship between slaves' feelings and physical discipline, and claimed that there was a relationship between slaves' happiness and fewer beatings.

Charles Ball also cited emotions as the reason why members of the planter class employed affective modes of punishment, arguing that this need was rooted in the fact that "no cordiality of feeling can ever exist between" master and slaves. Without "the sentiments that bind together the different members of society in a state of freedom and social equality," Ball argued that slaveholders "resort to...physical" and "mental coercion," which did not exist in other societies.⁵⁸⁹ This suggests that slaveholders used affective discipline not because they believed it would ensure "the happiness of both master and servant" but because they saw their slaves' emotions as incommensurate with their own. Unable to emotionally identify or relate to enslaved people, they sought to affectively master and discipline them.

However, as I discuss in the introduction, being known as a physically brutal master could also damage a master in the court of public opinion. According to Frederick Douglass some slaveholders tempered or avoided whipping because they valued their

⁵⁸⁸ A variety of articles from the planters' journal, *De Bow's Review* suggest that planters' conversations about how to affectively control slaves were happening in a context of larger debates about the relationship between fear, affection and governance. An article on Venice mentioned the philosophies of Montesquieu, and the notion that "Fear is produced by absolute power." Repeatedly the author mentioned that fear was "unfavorable to commerce," so it was the job of the government to suppress fear. Another article on "Free Banking" claimed that the American government's "true foundation is in the affections of the people, not in their fear." *DeBow's Review* January 1853, Vol. XIV, No. 1, "Free Banking" 32; *DeBow's Review* Vol. III-IV, "Venice – Its Government and Commerce", 51; Mississippi Planter "Management of Negroes Upon Southern Estates," *DeBow's Review*, Vol. X, June 1851 625

⁵⁸⁹ Charles Ball *Fifty Years in Chains; or, the Life of An American Slave* (1859) 298

“reputation” did not want to be known as “a cruel master.” Douglass claimed that only a truly “desperate slaveholder” would “incur” the “sense of shame” and “the odium” of their peers by beating their slaves so brutally that their neighbors could hear “the cries of his lacerated slave.”⁵⁹⁰ Thus while some members of the planter class might enact their feelings of pride or anger in lashes of the whip other emotions, pride and the desire to avoid “shame,” could also keep such cruelty in check. Such punishments were particularly visible and audible, and thus harder to conceal in small communities. Harriet Jacobs recalled that Dr Flint “had never punished me himself, and he would not allow anybody else to punish me,” even though, as Jacobs intimated, his wife truly wanted him to. According to Jacobs this amnesty from physical punishments was not due to mercy or kindness, but rather because he was afraid of what Jacobs might say, fearing that using “the lash might have led to remarks that would have exposed him in the eyes of his children and grandchildren.”⁵⁹¹

But slaveholders were not only concerned about the effect such punishments would have on their reputation, they were worried about the impact physical discipline had on a slave’s value. In “Memoirs on Slavery” William Harper argued that the goal of punishing slaves was to “produce obedience or reformation, with the least permanent injury,” so he advised whipping.⁵⁹² As Harper reveals, slaveholders knew that “permanent injury” and scars were to be avoided. According to Eugene Genovese, “badly scarred slaves dropped in value,” which led some members of the planter class to develop modes of punishment that did not “break...skin.” Instead some used a “Cowhide

⁵⁹⁰ Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 42

⁵⁹¹ Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 30-32

⁵⁹² William Harper “Harper’s Memoir on Slavery” *The Pro-Slavery Argument*, 34

paddle,” as it allegedly “left no scars while inflicting terrible pain.”⁵⁹³ I would argue that slaveholders also turned to affective punishment as an alternative to physical discipline.

Even physical discipline was often used towards affective ends, with the goal of curbing or provoking certain emotions. Henry Bibb claimed that the whip was used in the slave yard in order “to make the slaves anxious to be sold.”⁵⁹⁴ Physical violence was also occasionally necessary not only as a deterrent, but to give weight to another tool in slaveholders’ affective arsenal: threats. Focusing on affective discipline, and its relation to physical punishment, highlights just how much members of the planter class relied on threats and provoking enslaved fear to maintain slavery.

Though they could (and did) use physical violence to control slaves, Sally Hadden argues that Southern slave patrollers were also known to “toy...with a slave, threatening a whipping,” before ultimately releasing them. She believes this was done not out of mercy or clemency, but with the intention of heightening the “fear most slaves felt when they encountered slave patrols.”⁵⁹⁵ Individual masters also relied on the threat of physical cruelty or labor to instill certain emotions in their slaves. Harriet Jacobs recalled that when she was thwarting Dr. Flint’s attempts to seduce her he threatened to send Jacobs and her children to his son’s plantation, where he hinted they would all be forced to do heavier labor than they were accustomed to. Flint was clear that this was meant to

⁵⁹³ Similarly, Gwendolyn Midlo Hall claims that some slaveholders in St. Domingue viewed the punishment of cutting the hamstrings of frequent runaways with “great repugnance” in part because it would “diminish” a slave’s “value.” Gwendolyn Midlo Hall *Social Control in Slave Plantation Societies, A Comparison of St. Domingue and Cuba*, 75; Eugene Genovese *Roll, Jordan, Roll* 65

⁵⁹⁴ Henry Bibb in *Puttin' On Ole Massa*, (1969) 115

⁵⁹⁵ Sally E. Hadden *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001) 118

affectively punish her, as he said that the strenuous labor “was for my good” because her “feelings were entirely above my situation.”⁵⁹⁶

The fact that physical and emotional punishments often went hand-in-hand suggests that some members of the planter class felt that bodily pain was insufficient. Moses Grandy claimed that “many mistresses will insist on the slave who has been flogged begging pardon for her fault on her knees, and thanking her for the correction.”⁵⁹⁷ Clearly it was not enough for a slave to be physically punished for a perceived infraction, they must also ingratiate themselves to their master. Frederick Douglass experienced this first-hand as well. He described his former overseer, a Mr. Gore, whom he said “was just proud enough to demand the most debasing homage of the slave.”⁵⁹⁸ Douglass believed that Gore was driven to discipline slaves because of his own feelings of pride, which “demand(ed)” that the slaves on the plantation show him respect. If Frederick Douglass was right, then it would seem that members of the planter class used physical punishments of their slaves to affective ends, turning their slaves’ shame into their own pride.⁵⁹⁹

Other slaveholders used affection, their own, or the affective bonds of slaves for their loved ones, to punish their slaves. Frederick Douglass’s account of his childhood in the household of Mr. and Mrs. Auld suggests that fostering affection was as important to affective discipline as emotional cruelty. After having been at Col. Lloyd’s plantation Mrs. Auld’s “affections” for Douglass came as a shock. Over time he believed that her

⁵⁹⁶ Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 72

⁵⁹⁷ Moses Grandy in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) 36

⁵⁹⁸ Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 32

⁵⁹⁹ For more on the use of shaming punishments in the North and South see Lawrence Meir Friedman *Crime and Punishment in American History* (1993) and Michael S. Hindus, *Prisons and Plantation: Crime, Justice and Authority In Massachusetts and South Carolina, 1767-1878* (1980)

“tender” ways made him “both physically and mentally... more sensitive to good and ill-treatment” until he claimed that he “perhaps, suffered more from a frown from my mistress, than I formerly did from a cuff at the hands of Aunt Katy.”⁶⁰⁰ So not only did some slaves believe that they felt affective abuse more acutely than they did physical punishments, the passage suggests that masters could enact this emotional discipline by first inducing, then removing, affection, as Mrs. Auld did when she would “frown” at Douglass.

Pro-slavery author William Harper argued that love and fear were two sides of the same coin: “The principles of love and fear are brought to bear upon all human societies and individuals, as bonds to hold them together. But what could love avail without the terrors of punishment!”⁶⁰¹ Some enslaved people recognized that slaveholders strategically applied fear and affection, and it made them mistrustful of both. Harriet Jacobs recalled that her former master, Dr. Flint, employed a variety of methods in order to make his slaves do as he pleased, several of which relied on emotions for implementation and impact. According to Jacobs, “Sometimes he had stormy, terrific ways, that made his victims tremble; sometimes he assumed a gentleness that he thought must surely subdue.” Jacobs averred that “Of the two” affective expressions, “I preferred his stormy moods, although they left me trembling.”⁶⁰²

In spite of the claims by many slaveholders and pro-slavery authors that enslaved people did not forge strong familial bonds, slaves’ affective ties often became a vector for discipline. The ways that slaves’ family ties could be used as a mode of discipline is particularly evident in events when physical control was notably not used. Henry Bibb

⁶⁰⁰ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom* (2003 [1855]) 107

⁶⁰¹ William Harper “Harper’s Memoir on Slavery” *The Pro-Slavery Argument*, 34

⁶⁰² Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 26

recalled that when he and his family were being sold down river to New Orleans, there were times at ports when his hands were not bound. According to Bibb this was not because he was not a flight risk, as he had run away many times, but because his master “was not so much afraid of my running away from him while he held on to my family,” as the slaveholder knew that Bibb’s “attachment was too strong to run off and leave them in his hands,” even if the opportunity arose for him to escape.⁶⁰³

Family ties functioned to deter running away in other ways. When James Pennington contemplated whether or not to run away from his master thoughts of his parents and siblings gave him pause. It was “heartaching” to think of leaving them, not only because he feared he would never see them again, but because he worried that if he escaped they would “be sold off as a disaffected family, as is generally the case when one of its members” runs away.⁶⁰⁴ This was the quintessential form of affective discipline, intended to punish the fugitive, their family family, and to deter other slaves from escaping. Tainted by his disobedience, his family would be punished for inadequate affect, or being “disaffected,” and thus be sold as devalued and dangerous property. Filled with fear that his loved ones would bear the brunt of his decision to escape, Pennington initially dismissed the idea of escape. (When Pennington ultimately did run away, his family was sold to a planter in Virginia.)⁶⁰⁵

Of course, the most common way that slaveholders affectively punished slaves through their affective ties was to remove them from their loved ones. Frederick Douglass argued that when slaveholders mentioned selling a slave it was “generally”

⁶⁰³ Henry Bibb in *Puttin' On Ole Massa*, (1969) 113

⁶⁰⁴ James W.C. Pennington in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium*, 12-13

⁶⁰⁵ *ibid*, 58

made in the form of a "threat," intended as "punishment of a crime."⁶⁰⁶ But the threat was all too often realized. When Henry "Box" Brown angered his owner, he was immediately punished for it with the loss of his wife. Brown claimed that his master "determined that I should suffer too, and for that purpose he proceeded to sell my wife."⁶⁰⁷ So it can be used to punish those who are sold and those who are not.

Enslaved people knew that they were particularly likely to face sale if they proved to be affected by the sale of a loved one. Madison Jefferson, a slave from Virginia, recalled that when his sister was sold, his family was devastated, and "many tears were shed by the mother and by the whole family." However, he explained that "they were obliged to conceal their grief from their oppressors" because if their masters "caught them crying" the grieving slaves would be punished further, perhaps by being sold themselves.⁶⁰⁸ Charles Ball recalled that when he was sold as a child, and his mother vociferously protested, her ignored her pleas, and whipped her for her defiance. Though Ball was separated from her that day, he believed it likely that for this act of disobedience she was "no doubt" punished by being sold South where he surmised she "toiled out the residue of a forlorn and famished existence in the rice swamps or indigo fields of the South."⁶⁰⁹ Ball had no way of knowing if his hypothesis was correct or not, but it is revealing that it was assumed that emotional slaves would be sold as undesirable. Ball and Jefferson reveal that this belief was a widespread one amongst slaves, which may have reflected known cases of slaves being sold for exhibiting excessive or inappropriate emotions, or it might indicate the extent to

⁶⁰⁶ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 129

⁶⁰⁷ Henry "Box" Brown *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown* (2002) 45

⁶⁰⁸ Madison Jefferson in John Blassingame *Slave Testimony*, 217, 218, 221

⁶⁰⁹ Charles Ball *Fifty Years in Chains; or, the Life of An American Slave* (1859) 11-12

which slaveholders made their slaves believe that they would be separated from their loved ones if they did not suppress their emotions.

An 1860 letter from a Maryland planter to a former slave revealed more reasons why a slaveholder might be motivated to affectively punish a slave by selling them. The letter from T.D. Jones was written to his former slave Eliza, who he had sold in the past ostensibly for being “ungrateful” and untrustworthy. However, the letter suggested that in fact he sold her away from her daughter to punish her for an unnamed emotional slight that the enslaved woman had committed. According to Jones, Eliza had written herself not long before to inquire about her daughter, Jennie, “expressing the hope” that her master would allow her daughter to live with her. Eliza was clearly longing for her daughter enough to write to her former owner, but he seemed intent on making her feel those pangs of separation even more. He blithely announced that he had “read” the letter to Jennie, and that “she seemed glad to hear from....Aunt Liza....(as she calls you).” Nevertheless, he added, “she says she doesn’t want to go away from her master.” The tension of their affective tug-of-war was palpable. The slaveholder first emphasized how little Eliza meant to her daughter, as she was now referred to not as “mother,” but as “Aunt Liza,” before proceeding to tell her that her own daughter allegedly preferred to stay with her master rather than be reunited with Eliza. It is unclear if this was Jennie’s true desire, if she felt compelled to say that she wanted to stay with Jones, or if he was lying to hurt Eliza’s feelings. What was starkly evident was that the decision to allow Jennie to go or not was in his hands. He gloated over this power, seeming to draw out his decision by writing that he could “hardly make up [his] mind,” and that he “would be reluctant to part with her,” as he would “miss her very much” if she left, so he had “not

yet come to a decision.” In spite of this he claimed that he knew “how to estimate the claims of a mother and to appreciate the affection of a mother for her child.” He had seemingly put a price on these “claims,” and found the cost to be too high. His professed attempt at empathy only served to highlight the bond that had been severed, and the power he had to determine the family’s fate.

As the letter progressed it became clear why Jones might be keeping Eliza in a state of apprehension, as he hinted that she had injured his feelings in the past, when he was emotionally vulnerable. Jones complained that in Eliza’s last letter she had “made no inquiry after my welfare.” He seemed hurt that she appeared not to care, and he wondered if this omission of concern was deliberate, motivated by “indignation or malice because I parted with you?” He contrasted her churlishness with his own behavior, writing that she should “acknowledge that I was a kind and forbearing master” while she was “an ungrateful servant” who had been disloyal. Jones twisted his affective knife even deeper, claiming that if Eliza *had* acted “faithfully” then he would not have sold her, as “no offer would have tempted me to part with you.” In doing so he placed the responsibility for her heartbreak solely on her own shoulders. By selling her away from her daughter Jones was punishing Eliza for her emotional betrayal, as he swore that Eliza’s “tender affections and services” for his sick wife “created in me an attachment for you that nothing but your ingratitude and faithlessness could have broken.” Jones did not say how Elizabeth had acted disloyally, but he insinuated that her “faithlessness” affected him so profoundly because it came so soon “after the death of my dear beloved and still lamented wife.” Jones closed the letter by emphasizing how he still felt about her, perhaps because of the “attachment” he still had for her, or perhaps in an attempt to make

Eliza feel guilt.⁶¹⁰ Jones' many attempts to hurt Eliza's feelings throughout the letter hinted not only at his own cruelty and pain, but at his motives for selling Eliza. By continuing to keep her away from her daughter he revealed that he did not just want to sell Eliza, he wanted to sever her affective ties. But even separating her from her daughter was not enough to soothe the wrong he felt Eliza had done to him, as he continued to lash out at her verbally.

Jones' letter also indicates that slaves were not only punished for how their masters felt, they could be punished for how they made their masters feel. Fredrick Douglass recounted the sad tale of a slave named Esther, who "was courted" by another of Col. Lloyd's slaves, Edward Roberts. According to Douglass Lloyd set out "to break up the growing intimacy" developing between the two slaves, demanding that Esther not see Roberts any more. Douglass claimed that this "heartless order was, of course, broken" because "love" could not "be annihilated by the peremptory command of anyone." Douglass hinted that Lloyd's reasons for trying to sever the relationship were "brutal and selfish," based in his own desire for Esther. But Douglass claimed that Lloyd could no more coerce her into having feelings for him than he could force her to stop loving Roberts. Realizing that he was "Abhorred and circumvented" in Esther's affections, Lloyd set out to enact vengeance with an "exhibition of his rage...toward Esther." One morning Lloyd stripped her to the waist, bound her resist, and whipped her repeatedly. Douglass watched through chinks in the wall, describing Lloyd as "cruelly

⁶¹⁰ It is unclear what the past relationship was between the slaveholder and Eliza, but there are hints in the way that he discusses Jennie. One of the reasons the slaveholder was "reluctant" to let Jennie leave was, he told Eliza, "She is petted as you used to be. She is a watchful little spy as you used to be." Butler Family Papers June-Dec 1860, MSS 1026, Box 5 of 18, LSU Baton Rouge, Lower Mississippi Valley Collection

deliberate....as one who was delighted with the scene.” Esther cried for mercy, but Douglass believed that this “seemed only to increase his fury.”⁶¹¹

Eliza’s crime was seemingly not only that she had loved Edward, or “abhorred” Lloyd, but rather that she had made Lloyd feel jealousy and rage over being thwarted. He chose a physical punishment to castigate Esther’s affective betrayal. His goal was to affectively chasten Esther, but it also seemed cathartic for Lloyd, as he transformed his “rage” towards her into pleasure at whipping her. In these cases, the enslaved person (often female) had to be punished for how the slaveholder felt, so that the master didn’t have to acknowledge how they felt about the slave, or the influence their slave had over their emotions. In a sense, this was a way of reasserting power over someone who had shaped their emotions, and the punishment was meant to fit the perceived affective crime.

Slaves were also disciplined for how they felt, or rather, for their performance of emotions that were deemed unacceptable. This is evident in slaves who were punished for “insubordination” or “insolence.”⁶¹² This taught slaves to censor their emotions. Slaves were well aware that they faced punishment if they were perceived to be feeling an emotion deemed inappropriate or problematic by their master. Moses Grandy argued that “Slaves are under fear in every word they speak” because if they voiced any “expression of discontent,” and their master learned of this, “severe flogging is often the consequence.”⁶¹³ Clearly masters wanted contented slaves, or at least slaves who were not vocally “discontent.” Though whipping an unhappy slave would not likely make the

⁶¹¹ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom* (2003 [1855]) 65-67

⁶¹² Lawrence Meir Friedman *Crime and Punishment in American History* (1993) 88

⁶¹³ Similarly, James Bradley, formerly enslaved in South Carolina and Arkansas, declared in 1835 “if a slave shows any discontent, he is sure to be treated worse, and worked the harder for it, and every slave knows this.” James Bradley in John Blassingame *Slave Testimony* 688-690; Moses Grandy in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) 36

slave any more content, it would prevent the slave from freely expressing their feelings in the future. Beating slaves who shared inappropriate emotions served to enforce the emotional norms of slavery, but “fear” of being whipped for discontentment also served to police the boundaries of appropriate and inappropriate affective expressions. These beatings didn’t necessarily prevent emotions, so much as promote the sense of ongoing affective disciplining, and self-censorship.

Of course, some slaves refused to suppress or censor emotions that were deemed inappropriate or undesirable in a slave. As Josiah Henson learned, enslaved people were certainly not supposed to feel anger or jealousy towards white people. After Henson’s mother experienced a “brutal assault” at the hands of the plantation overseer, his father responded by “beating” the man who had attacked his wife. Though he was no older than four at the time, Henson recalled how his father was given “a hundred lashes,” and had “his right ear...cut off close to his head” for assaulting a white man. This series of events fundamentally changed Henson’s father. Henson explained that “furious at such treatment, my father became a different man, and was so morose, disobedient, and intractable,” that their owner decided he had to be sold.⁶¹⁴ The incident was, for Henson, one deeply rooted in emotions. Henson recognized that for being brutally punished for seeking revenge on a man who had assaulted his own wife, his father became angry, and then “morose,” and that these factors made him an undesirable slave. By punishing him physically for his initial act of anger, but only selling him after he became “morose” and “intractable,” it was clear, at least to Henson, that his father was sold for exhibiting the wrong emotions.⁶¹⁵

⁶¹⁴ Josiah Henson *The life of Josiah Henson: formerly a slave, now an inhabitant of Canada*, 1849, 1-2

⁶¹⁵ *ibid*, 2

Henson's narrative hints that an angry slave might be beaten but a sad slave was more likely to be sold. Solomon Northup described how a woman he was sold with, Eliza, expressed intense pain at having been sold away from her children, much to the chagrin of her new master. Northup recalled that when "our purchaser" saw how inconsolable his new slave was his face revealed "an expression indicative of regret at having bought her at the expense of so much sorrow." Clearly Eliza had immediately depreciated in value by expressing emotions, and sorrow in particular. Masters clearly saw such feelings as related to worker productivity. As Eliza grew increasingly despondent after being separated from her children her work began to suffer. Northup recalled that Eliza displeased their mistress by "being more occupied in brooding over her sorrows than in attending to her business" and as a result she was ordered "to work in the field." In any case, the change from working indoors to laboring in the field had little impact on Eliza's expressions of sorrow, and eventually she was sold "for a trifle" to another man. She continued to decline emotionally and physically, as Northup explains that "grief had gnawed remorselessly at her heart, until her strength was gone." Because of the impact her sorrow had on her work her new master "lashed and abused her most unmercifully. But he could not whip back the departed vigor" and health she possessed "when her children were around her."⁶¹⁶

This chain of events speaks volumes about how slaveholders perceived enslaved people who exhibited emotions they found problematic, undesirable, or unproductive. Though slaves often described the separation of families by sale as an emotional moment Eliza's candid display of "so much sorrow" clearly made her new master "regret" purchasing someone who felt so intensely, or could not mask her emotions. This marked

⁶¹⁶ Solomon Northup in *Puttin' On Ole Massa*, 268, 280, 311

the beginning of what was viewed as a massive devaluation due to how she felt, and how those feelings shaped her productivity. Eliza's banishment to the field may have been intended to punish her for displaying emotions other than contentment. Or perhaps her mistress simply grew uncomfortable at having to encounter how her slaves truly felt about the conditions of slavery. When this did not prove to alter her emotions, she was sold, but at a deeply discounted price, a mere "trifle." When she still expressed intense "grief," her final master tried, in vain, to whip the emotions out of her. Clearly this master agreed with what Frederick Douglass referred to as the commonly held "old doctrine that submission is the best cure for outrage"⁶¹⁷ But "outrage" was not the only emotion that slaves were punished for expressing.

Slaveholders may have believed that punishing slaves for inappropriate emotions would stave off a deepening of these emotions, which could lead to running away, or the dreaded "disaffection." Samuel Cartwright opined that "before the negroes run away, unless they are frightened or panic-struck, they become sulky and dissatisfied."⁶¹⁸ He intended this as evidence that slaveholders could keep slaves from running away if they insured their slaves' contentment. But his assertion that "sulky" moods and discontentment presaged escape could also convince slaveholders that rather than trying to make their slaves happy, and watching for signs of their dissatisfaction, they should ward off escape attempts by punishing the emotions that supposedly preceded running away.⁶¹⁹

Though affective modes of discipline were popular for a number of reasons, they were not always successful. Daniel Walker point out that attempts to maintain stringent

⁶¹⁷ Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 72

⁶¹⁸ Samuel Cartwright "Diseases and Peculiarities of the Negro Race," *DeBow's Review*, Vol. XI, 1851

⁶¹⁹ Lawrence Meir Friedman *Crime and Punishment in American History*, 88

“social control” in societies structured with racial hierarchies “could also lead to a loss of control,” as people resisted the forces of oppression that stifled them.⁶²⁰ Enslaved people adopted a number of responses to modes of affective control and discipline. One way enslaved people did this was by forging strong bonds with family and with community. This helped enslaved people to craft what Trudier Harris refers to as “an untouchable core in black humanity.”⁶²¹ A number of historians have written about individual and collective efforts by enslaved people to resist the oppression of slavery through affective ties, and by fighting attempts to sever those bonds.⁶²²

But enslaved people also found other methods of defying affective discipline. Harriet Jacobs’ narrative suggests that enslaved people also resisted the institution of slavery by refusing to feel what their masters wanted them to. Jacobs described how her uncle Benjamin was jailed after being caught trying to run away. His master declared that Benjamin would “serve as an example for the rest of his slaves,” and to do so he would “be kept in jail until he was subdued, or be sold.” Several months passed, and then “One day” Benjamin “was heard to sing and laugh” in his jail cell. According to Jacobs “this piece of indecorum was told to his master, and the overseer was ordered to re-chain him.” This would suggest that those who would punish him not only believed that he needed to be physically incarcerated, but also emotionally restrained, as proof that he had been thoroughly punished. Perhaps realizing this, Benjamin refused to be contrite. Jacobs

⁶²⁰ WPA-LSU “Albert Patterson Interview” quoted in Daniel E. Walker, *No More, No More: Slavery and Cultural Resistance in Havana and New Orleans*, 40

⁶²¹ Trudier Harris *The Scary Mason-Dixon Line: African American Writers and the South*, 15

⁶²² For example see John Blassingame *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (1972); Herbert Gutman *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (1977); Jacqueline Jones *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family From Slavery to the Present* (1985); Brenda Stevenson *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (1997); Emily West *Chains of Love: Slave Couples in Antebellum South Carolina* (2004) Deborah Gray White *Ar’n’t I A Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (1999)

claimed that though chained up Benjamin “worked at his chains till he succeeded in getting out of them.” He then slipped the chains out the window “through the bars... with a request that they should be taken to his master.”⁶²³ Seemingly the more Benjamin resisted affective control the more his master sought to chain him physically and emotionally.

Jacobs herself later infuriated her master when she refused to be intimidated by his threats. In order to still inspire fear Flint asked Jacobs “you know that I have a right to do as I like with you, - that I can kill you, if I please?”⁶²⁴ Jacobs responded “You have tried to kill me, and I wish you had; but you have no right to do as you like with me.” He followed this with another threat, asking her “How would you like to be sent to jail for your insolence?” This also backfired, as she replied that she wouldn’t mind because in jail “there would be more peace for me than there is here.” He then announced that he was “not ready to” jail her just yet.⁶²⁵ Just as Benjamin had, Jacobs showed herself to be fearless, proving that her master could not use affective modes of discipline to provoke the emotions in her that he desired.

Meanwhile, some enslaved people may even have sought to take advantage of modes of affective discipline, exploiting the notion that “disaffected” and disrespected slaves should be sold, and quickly. Sella Martin had a number of owners during his time in bondage, including a couple outside of New Orleans. Longing to live in New Orleans, where he believed he could more easily escape up river, Martin decided to sow discord with his owner’s wife, in the hopes that he would be sold as a “disaffected” slave. Martin set about “constantly quarrelling with her” in order to “provoke” his master “either to sell

⁶²³ Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 22-23

⁶²⁴ *Ibid*, 36-37

⁶²⁵ *Ibid*, 36-37

me or to release me from a vigilance that was standing in the way of my plans for escape.” Martin bickered with the woman until he “succeeded,” and was sold to a man who resided in New Orleans.⁶²⁶ This was a victory for Martin, as it paved the way for his eventual escape to freedom up the Mississippi River, but he was also clearly proud of having tricked and manipulated his master into selling him for being disobedient.

Though many historians have ignored non-corporeal forms of punishment used to correct slaves, discipline in the Antebellum South was thoroughly shaped by emotions. Attention to the role emotions played in discipline not only provides insight into daily interactions and abuses of slavery, it sheds light on the myriad affective ways that those in positions of authority exercise and maintain their power. Enslaved people would find ways to endure and resist emotional modes of discipline. The full extent of the affective control and punishments used under slavery would become clear with the coming of Emancipation, which would throw these systems into upheaval.

⁶²⁶ Sella Martin in John Blassingame *Slave Testimony* (1998) 728

Chapter Six: "The Pursuit of Happiness":
The Emotional Norms of Slavery in the Wake of Emancipation

"You got to hold tight a place in you where they can't come." Alice Walker, *Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970)

As a free resident of New York who was kidnapped into slavery, Solomon Northup knew what it meant to be free, and what it felt like to be robbed of one's liberty. Northup would later describe the experience of being taken as a captive in Washington, D.C, the seat of a government that was ostensibly fundamentally based "on... man's inalienable right to life, LIBERTY and the pursuit of happiness!" dryly noting, "Hail, Columbia, happy land indeed."⁶²⁷ Though he highlighted the irony of being enslaved in a town meant to represent "liberty," he also emphasized the hypocrisy of the last inalienable right, that of a universal right to the "pursuit of happiness," by sarcastically referring to Washington as "happy....indeed."⁶²⁸ Nor was Northup alone in seeing the link between freedom and emotional liberty. Throughout his narrative Northup was emphatic that even people who had been born and raised in slavery understood the meaning of "life, liberty,

⁶²⁷ Solomon Northup Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1969) 249

⁶²⁸ Perhaps aware of claims that slaves, as people, were owed liberty as well as the right to pursue happiness, some pro-slavery advocates tried to address, or dismantle those assertions. In a pro-slavery essay William Harper referred to the preamble to the Declaration of Independence, which stated "that men are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Harper then set about to deconstruct this argument. He began by positing that "no man was ever born free... that no two men were ever born equal," and that any people, including children and prisoners, were regularly denied their rights to freedom. Meanwhile, William Gilmore Simms argued in "The Morals of Slavery" that the Declaration was written in "angry" times, by "angry" forefathers, and that "what they alleged to be self-evident *then*, is at this time, when we are comparatively cool, a source of very great doubt and disputation." Simms argued that the idea of the preamble came from "sentimental French philosophy, then so current," but now, he insinuated, this passionate rhetoric, including the talk of universal rights, was at odds with the "cool" rational, thinking of contemporary people. William Harper "Harper's Memoir on Slavery" *The Pro-Slavery Argument* (Charleston: Walker, Richards & Co. 1852) 5-7; William Gilmore Simms "The Morals of Slavery" *The Pro-Slavery Argument* (Charleston: Walker, Richards & Co. 1852) 250-251

and the pursuit of happiness,” and that “ninety-nine out of every hundred” people in bondage yearned for those rights. Furthermore, he claimed that enslaved people fully comprehended the rights and responsibilities that came with freedom, and that liberty would “secure to them the enjoyment of domestic happiness.”⁶²⁹ According to Northup, enslaved people were well aware that freedom and their ability to “enjoy...happiness” were inextricably tied.

The writings of historians and former slaves alike reveal that the “enjoyment of freedom” was the overarching goal of many enslaved people.⁶³⁰ Slaves described their dreams of “enjoying freedom,” and of liberty as something to be “enjoyed.”⁶³¹ Henry Bibb described how much he “should like to enjoy freedom and happiness” with his wife and child, while Jacob Stroyer lamented the fate of slaves who died right before Emancipation, who had come so close to “freedom but not living to enjoy it.”⁶³² Notably they did not say that freedom was something to be possessed, or exercised, it was a right that was ineluctably intertwined with happiness: to be free was to be able to pursue happiness, and great joy was derived from freedom. This language was employed in legal documents as well. Slaves who were manumitted in Louisiana were promised their “liberty, to have and to enjoy the same from this day henceforth.”⁶³³ The phrase was also frequently found in court cases pertaining to slaves and free people of color. A woman

⁶²⁹ Solomon Northup, Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa* (1969) 338, 370

⁶³⁰ Tera W. Hunter *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997) 1-2

⁶³¹ For example, see Jacob Stroyer in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) 35; Solomon Northup from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa* (1969) 227; James Madison in John Blassingame *Slave Testimony*, 267; Charles Ball *Fifty Years in Chains; or, the Life of An American Slave* (New York: H. Dayton Publishers, 1859) 298-299

⁶³² Henry Bibb from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa* (1969) 94; Jacob Stroyer in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) 61

⁶³³ Jean Baptiste Meuillon Papers, 713, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans, La.

who claimed she was a free person who had been kidnapped into slavery was described as having “been in the enjoyment of her freedom” for many years, but being falsely enslaved had denied her this right.⁶³⁴ All these sources suggest that in the minds of slaves and former slaves, freedom was fundamentally linked to joy, and the right to seek and expect happiness was perceived to be a crucial component of freedom.

Slaves and former slaves, and even the courts of the Antebellum South recognized the crucial relationship between freedom and emotional liberty, and, perhaps because of this, many members of the planter class saw black freedom as a menace to the emotional norms of slavery.⁶³⁵ To stave off this perceived threat they worked to limit manumission, and to maintain the affective relations of master and slave with former slaves, but this system would fall into crisis with the end of slavery. In the wake of Emancipation former slaves found a variety of ways to challenge and dismantle the emotional norms and practices of the institution, but whites did not respond well to this seismic shift in the affective landscape of the South. As a result, while free people worked to exercise their right to “enjoy freedom,” white Southerners employed legal and extralegal methods in an effort to preserve as many of the affective norms and rules of slavery as possible in the decades following the war.

During the period known as Reconstruction Southern society was in flux, and free people and former slaveholders alike battled to define the new affective parameters that

⁶³⁴ *Trudeau’s Executive v. Robinette*, 4 Mart. La. 577, January 1817; For more reference to the language of “enjoying” freedom, or freedom to “enjoy” or be “enjoyed” in court cases see *Bazzi v. Rose and her Child*, 8 Mart. La. 149, May 1820; *Catin v. D’Orgenoy’s Heirs*, 8 Mart. La. 218, June 1820; *Julien v. Langlish*, 9 Mart. La. 205, January 1821

⁶³⁵ William Reddy sees emotional liberty as the ability of a person to experiment with different emotional goals and expressive behaviors, as well as a measure of the freedom of a given society. A society that allows for emotional liberty will, in his view, permit and even encourage individuals to engage in affective “self-exploration” or trying different modes of emotional management and expression. William M. Reddy *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework For the History of Emotions*, 129

would structure society. Eric Foner has termed Reconstruction an “Unfinished Revolution,” because it did not live up to many of its promises to free people.⁶³⁶ Subsequent historians have written about how Reconstruction fell short of its objectives of political rights and economic equity for former slaves, but these were not the only failings of the era.⁶³⁷ In this chapter I explore efforts by Southern whites to deny blacks not only their right to vote, but also their right to emotional liberty, as well as black responses to affective disenfranchisement.

While many enslaved people and free people of color suggested that with freedom came freedom of emotional expression, many white Southerners seemed to think differently. In the Antebellum South, in which emotional norms and practices were prescribed by slave or free status, members of the planter class viewed free blacks as a threat to the social and affective order of slavery. This was clear in both laws and practices regarding manumission, and in the feelings some Southerners expressed about relations between free black people and whites. For white Southerners, the abolition of slavery would endanger the affective strictures of slavery. In his essay “On Slavery,” Thomas Roderick Dew argued that freeing slaves would be detrimental to the contentment of master and slave, asserting that “emancipation...can easily be shown to be utterly subversive of the interests, security and happiness of both the blacks and whites.”⁶³⁸ Former slaves were all too aware of how white Southerners felt about free

⁶³⁶ Eric Foner *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988)

⁶³⁷ See for example Peter Kolchin “The Tragic Era? Interpreting Southern Reconstruction in Comparative Perspective” *The Meaning of Freedom: Economics, Politics, and Culture After Slavery* ed. F. McGlynn and S. Drescher (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992) 292, 293; Leon F. Litwack *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Knopf, 1979)

⁶³⁸ He also warned that “emancipation would” rob former slaveowners of their supposed “sympathies and kind feelings for the black” which he claimed slaveholders possessed for their slaves. Thomas Roderick

blacks. William Craft remarked that “the great majority of slaveholders hate” free people of color, and that members of the planter class had “no mercy upon, nor sympathy for, any negro whom they cannot enslave.”⁶³⁹ Paternalism might be rooted in the belief that slaveholders would show “sympathy” to their slaves, but Craft claimed that only hatred was reserved for those who existed outside of the confines of slavery. Claiming that masters were unable to show “mercy” for those they could “not enslave,” Craft suggested that slaveholders “hate(d)” any person of color if they could not dictate the terms of their affective relations, and thus exert control over them.

Fears about the emotional influence of freedom had a very real impact on the lives of slaves. This is evident from the invocation of Georgia manumission law in a case where a man requested that four of his slaves be freed after his death. The slaveholder’s will was contested in a trial, in which a judge cited Georgia’s “Act of December 19th, 1818” which declared that the state needed to limit manumissions in order “to prevent a horde of free persons of color, from ravaging the morals, and corrupting the feelings of our slaves.”⁶⁴⁰ As a result, the four slaves were not freed. By asserting that “free persons of color” would invariably “corrupt...the feelings of our slaves” the law revealed that members of the planter class thought that free people of color possessed emotions that were not only problematic, but also contagious. Some slaveholders clearly believed that the affective behavior of free people should not be allowed to infect their slaves, and that signs of such free feelings should be swiftly staunched. Harriet Jacobs recalled how her

Dew “Professor Dew on Slavery” *The Pro-Slavery Argument* (Charleston: Walker, Richards & Co. 1852) 293, 437

⁶³⁹ William Craft *Running a Thousand Miles For Freedom; or, the Escape of William and Ellen Craft From Slavery*, 37

⁶⁴⁰ *Roger, next friend of negro woman Antoinette, her two children, and negro man Jack, v. Marlow*, R.M.C. 542, May 1837 (Georgia)

master, Dr. Flint threatened to send her to perform manual labor on a plantation because her "feelings were entirely above [her] situation, and that on the plantation [she] would receive treatment that was suitable" for a slave.⁶⁴¹ Clearly Flint hoped to remind her of her enslavement, and to instill in her how enslaved people were supposed to feel. According to Flint, the appropriate feeling for a person in her "situation" was to feel dually afraid of their master.

Lunsford Lane witnessed firsthand how white resentment of free blacks also shaped laws regarding slaves who managed to be manumitted. Once he purchased his liberty Lunsford Lane was required to leave the state of North Carolina, a policy that galled him as his family was still enslaved, and he hoped to be near them while he worked to buy their freedom. Lane believed that this law, which sought to sever the affective bonds of former slaves, was rooted in race-based hatred. Lane protested being "banished," noting that from the moment he set about to buy his freedom he had intentionally tried "to conduct myself as not to become obnoxious to the white inhabitants, knowing as I did...their hostility to the colored people."⁶⁴² Interestingly this revealed that Lane believed that white, prejudice-fueled "hostility" was codified as policy, but also that he believed or at least hoped that the individual actions of free people of color could counter this collective loathing.

Other states permitted manumission, but only if a white person would testify to the good character of the enslaved person who sought freedom. In 1847 Phillip Moore

⁶⁴¹ Nor was Harriet Jacobs the only slave threatened with punishment for enacting feelings deemed unseemly for a slave. Mattie Jackson recalled that one day, when her owner, Mrs. Cox, was upset with Mattie's mother, Mrs. Cox announced "I am just tired out with the 'white airs' you put on, and if you don't behave differently, I will make Mr. Cox sell you down the river at once." Dr. L.S. Thompson, *The Story of Mattie J. Jackson, A True Story, written and arranged by Dr. L.S. Thompson, As Given By Mattie* (Lawrence: 1866) 21; Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* 72

⁶⁴² Lunsford Lane in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) 17

began the process to free one of his late mother's slaves, which he claimed had been her "dying wish." He swore that the enslaved woman, Henrietta, could earn a living once freed, and she had always shown "good conduct" while enslaved which made him believe that she was deserved freedom and would "not abuse its exercise." But even Moore's word was not enough. An acquaintance of the Moore family who knew Henrietta testified to her character as well, saying that he could attest that he had always "found her honest, well-behaved and industrious." Four additional people signed statements to this effect.⁶⁴³ It did not suffice for a would-be free person to be seen as trustworthy and to meet the emotional norms of slavery while in bondage, slaves were also expected to do this if they ever wanted to be manumitted. Policy-makers and slaveholders seemingly clung to the notion that the emotional behavior of an enslaved person might predict affective relations after slavery. The oath that Henrietta would not "abuse" her freedom also hinted that some members of the planter class believed that other former slaves had done just that once they were free.

This was not the only way in which slaveholders sought to solidify the bonds of master and slave, and maintain the affective norms of slavery even after manumission. Louisiana slaveholder Sambo Bellastre freed fifty-year-old Suzanne, declaring his wish that she should have "her liberty, to have and to enjoy... in as full, absolute, and complete a manner ...as though she had been born free." In spite of this supposed "absolute" freedom, a symbolic renaissance, in which Suzanne was declared to be a person "born free," the ties of slaveholder and slave were retained in a "promise" by

⁶⁴³ It is notable that Phillip Moore claimed that manumitting Henrietta was "the dying wish of his late mother." As with previous cases it seemed that members of the planter class believed that affective claims could compete with legal claims, as evidenced by how many people employed such rhetoric in court. Slave Manuscript Collection 503, Folder 5, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans, La.

Bellastre that in keeping with Louisiana law he would “oblige myself and my heirs...to nourish and maintain the said Suzanne...whenever she shall be in want owing to sickness, old age, insanity, or any other proved infirmity.”⁶⁴⁴ By placing the onus of care on former masters, the state of Louisiana was not only striving to reduce the financial burden of caring for the indigent, they were maintaining the social structures and systems of obligation of slavery. Ultimately these efforts to limit the emotional expressions of free people of color and to control their social relations with other slaves and their former masters seemed to hint at a desire on the part of slaveholders to emotionally control those that they could not legally master.

Though members of the planter class strived to maintain the affective norms and practices of slavery for slaves and free people of color alike, this would become increasingly difficult with the outbreak of war in 1861. Some slaveholders perceived emotional shifts in their slaves as soon as the war began. Mary Chesnut in particular became even more obsessed with reading the faces of the slaves around her for signs of an affective sea-change, and devoted a great deal of space in her diary to wondering how the possibly of freedom would emotionally affect them. In May 1861 she wrote that she now saw “the demoralization produced by hopes of freedom,” when an enslaved house servant was noticeably distant. She explained that his work had not suffered, but he was quiet and “aloof,” and did not engage in his “usual...friendly chat.” Chesnut compared this marked change to the butler’s wife, whom Chesnut claimed “showed no signs of disaffection.”⁶⁴⁵ Chesnut’s observations about the couple hint that slaveholders believed that the mere proximity of freedom affectively altered slaves, making them dissatisfied and unaffectionate.

⁶⁴⁴ Jean Baptiste Meullon Papers, 713, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans, La.

⁶⁴⁵ *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War* ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) 78

The coming of war also forced slaveholders to acknowledge that their slaves might not just be less “friendly,” but might actively resent their owners. As a result, some slaveholders harbored concerns that their slaves planned to run away, and were exasperated by the ease with which their slaves were able to escape.⁶⁴⁶ As a result, members of the planter class found ways to or suppress these fears, and to convince themselves that their slaves remained loyal and loving. Mary Chesnut’s husband James Chesnut addressed the rampant rumors that their slaves were “dissatisfied,” and planning to run by visiting the slaves on their plantation. Something in their behavior or demeanor assuaged his concerns, as Chesnut reported that her husband returned “charmed” with their slaves’ fidelity and “their affection for him.”⁶⁴⁷ Chesnut herself sought solace in the idea that the last time the British occupied South Carolina the local “slaves certainly were faithful,” and didn’t run, a romanticization of the past given the fact that her husband’s grandfather lost a number of slaves who ran away to join the British.⁶⁴⁸ Clearly slaveholders like Chesnut wanted to maintain the fantasy that they were beloved by their slaves, and would seemingly ignore any evidence that suggested otherwise.

While slaveholders were wondering what their slaves were feeling, and if they would be “faithful” through the conflict, an article originally published in the *New York Tribune* in late December 1861 gleefully surmised that this would not be the case. The author declared that the “attempts of Southern papers to pretend that the blacks are still loyal” were “absurd.” Instead the author claimed that the enslaved people who had “not yet escaped of course pretend to be faithful,” even going so far as to tell their owners that the South would win, though they fervently hoped for the contrary. The reporter noted

⁶⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 407, 467, 535, 159

⁶⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 375

⁶⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 220

that he had come South “prepared to find all the negroes attached to their masters” but instead he had “observed a feeling of bitterness displayed by the blacks” as their initial “elation” about war shifted into increasing “indignation” at their owners, and their attempts to keep their slaves from running away (even going so far as to shoot at slaves who would try to escape.)⁶⁴⁹ In observing that enslaved people were feigning being “faithful,” yet also becoming increasingly, and overtly “bitter,” the article hinted that slaves were still performing affection and loyalty, but were becoming less inclined to do so, and more unwilling to suppress their feelings.

In spite of their assertions that their slaves could be trusted, many slaveholders not only feared that war might lead to their slaves’ disaffection, and escape, but that their slaves’ discontentment might have more dangerous consequences. Members of the planter class had long feared that emancipation would lead to a vengeance-fueled race war. William Harper opined in 1838 that if freed, former slaves would turn to crime and violence. He predicted that “the blacks will be tempted to avenge themselves by oppression and proscription of the white race,” and that such “retaliation” would lead to “open war” between the races. In Harper’s opinion, Emancipation would result in no less than widespread “misery, discord, horror, and atrocity” for all.⁶⁵⁰ In many ways, this mirrored the proslavery claim that enslaved people were happy in bondage. However, stirring up fears of post-emancipation racial “discord” served not only the proslavery agenda, but the project of white solidarity, as

⁶⁴⁹ A December 23, 1861, report from Hilton Head, SC, New York *Tribune*, excerpted in John Blassingame *Slave Testimony*, 360-363

⁶⁵⁰ In the same vein, and over thirty years before the Civil War drew to a close, Professor Thomas Roderick Dew warned that if someone were to “liberate our slaves” then it would inevitably lead to “horrors” and slave insurrection. Thomas Roderick Dew “Professor Dew on Slavery” *The Pro-Slavery Argument*, 439; For more on white fears about slaves rebellion in the last years of the war see Tera W. Hunter *To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors After the Civil War*, 20; William Harper “Harper’s Memoir on Slavery” *The Pro-Slavery Argument*, 48-49, 73

even non-slaveholding whites were encouraged to maintain the institution, lest the supposed contentment of slavery be replaced by the “misery” and “horror” of race war.

Mary Chesnut experienced a glimpse of such vengeance first-hand, when her cousin was smothered to death by her slaves. Afterwards, Chesnut remarked that “I feel that the ground is cut away from under my feet,” as she was troubled by her own grief, as well as misgivings about her slaves. Nor was Chesnut alone in her sudden confusion about the tenor of the affective relations between slaves and slaveholders. The night that they learned of the murder Chesnut’s friend Kate confessed to Chesnut that she was worried about how her enslaved maid felt about her, asking Chesnut “Does she mean to take care of me – or to murder me?”⁶⁵¹

As the war progressed, Mary Chesnut continued to write a great deal about the emotional changes she observed in her slaves, and how they impacted relations between slaveholders and the enslaved. In 1863, Chesnut wrote that the slaves around her were “unreadable,” though she now saw great significance in the “black masks” they donned. She noted that these “masks” were as revealing as outright rejoicing, since she argued that “on all other subjects except the war they are the most excitable of races.” Since she perceived enslaved people to generally be emotionally transparent, and easily “excitable,” the palpable lack of any affective reaction about the war was telling to her, and made her think her slaves were hiding their true feelings. By the summer of 1864 Chesnut was attributing even more meaning to her slaves’ affective performances, fretting about how the “sphinxes” revealed nothing about how they felt about the approach of Sherman. In fact, she believed that the slaves around her were acting “more obedient and more considerate than ever...when *we are*

⁶⁵¹ Of course, there were also rumors that slaveholders were killing their slaves, which enslaved people were afraid of, for example see *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, 235, 198-199

in the house,” which she seemed to find even more disconcerting.⁶⁵² She now read volumes into the emotions they didn’t express, beginning to see that the slaves around her often performed emotions for the masters’ benefit, and were likely concealing certain emotions in her presence. Slaveholders like Chesnut had always tried to discern what their slaves were feeling, but now that she expected a change in their emotions, this task became all the more dire, and maddening when she felt thwarted.

In April of 1865 she wrote again about how her slaves were “mask(ing)” their feelings, explaining that she had given some of her diamonds to a slave to hide when they feared a raid by Union soldiers was imminent. Though Chesnut clearly trusted the enslaved woman, at least enough to charge her with protecting her precious jewels, Chesnut seemed upset that the woman showed no emotional response to being given this responsibility, and stunned that the enslaved woman viewed them “with as little apparent interest in the matter as if they were garden peas.”⁶⁵³ The scene not only reveals that Chesnut was growing increasingly concerned by her slaves’ lack of affect to the point of obsession, it suggests that Chesnut was perhaps testing the woman by asking her to harbor the gems till the threat of raid had passed. Just three months before the end of the war Chesnut claimed that her slaves still appeared “utterly apathetic,” though she questioned if that would be the case “if they saw us triumphant.”⁶⁵⁴ For Chesnut, her slaves’ apathy no longer signaled a lack of awareness about the war, it now was proof of Union sympathies.

How the slaves felt about war was clearly a subject of much interest and debate amongst members of the planter class. Chesnut discussed the matter with an acquaintance, at a party, her friend conjecturing that “we have no reason to suppose a negro knows there is a

⁶⁵² *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War* (1981) 235, 699, 794

⁶⁵³ *Ibid*, 699, 794

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 704

war,” noting that she did not discuss the conflict with her slaves. Still, she feared that they knew more than they let on, as she remarked that when the topic of war or the “Damn Yankee” came up, she watched her slaves, and observed “the sudden deadening of their faces.” Meanwhile, two other friends told Chesnut worriedly “that the joy of their negroes” after the Union invasion was “loud and open.”⁶⁵⁵ These scenes highlight that not all enslaved people reacted the same to the coming of the Union when in the presence of their masters, but whether they exhibited “joy” or seemed unchanged, slaveholders were clearly reading their slaves’ faces more intently than ever, hoping to discern the feelings that lay within, and what those emotions might portend for themselves.

Slaveowners saw great import in their slaves’ outward displays of emotions, especially as the war progressed. But the writings of former slaves also reveal an interest in how their emotions changed in relation to the promise of freedom, with a focus on the interior, affective metamorphosis they experienced. The enslaved people who sought their own liberty, through purchase or escape, typically portrayed this affective process as a complete and instantaneous transformation. Some described the overwhelming exultation they experienced once they felt symbolically free, whether or not they were on free soil. William Wells Brown remarked that as he and his family drew closer to “a land of liberty, my heart would at times leap for joy.”⁶⁵⁶ Henry Bibb finally escaped slavery by boat, but he used identical language to describe how, as the boat drew near to “the mouth of the river Ohio,” his “heart leaped up for joy at the glorious prospect that I

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid, 234

⁶⁵⁶ On the following page Brown repeated this sentiment, claiming that “the thought that I should one day be free...made my heart leap for joy.” William Wells Brown from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin’ On Ole Massa* (1969) 205, 206

should... be free.”⁶⁵⁷ Countless authors of slave narratives would describe similar experiences of being flooded with new feelings, always portrayed as a spontaneous and total change in feelings. Like Brown and Bibb, many invoked feelings of “joy,” further emphasizing the claim that freedom from slavery and emotional liberty were synonymous.

William Wells Brown later described in more detail how becoming free fundamentally altered how he felt and perceived himself. He observed that “the fact that I was a freeman – could walk, talk, eat and sleep as a man, and no one to stand over me with the blood-clotted cowhide – all this made me feel that I was not myself.”⁶⁵⁸ He recognized the extent of his newfound liberty through the myriad activities he could now engage in more freely, but this also had a profound emotional impact on Brown, as he felt himself to be changed, “not myself.” To be a free man then was to feel differently, at least in part because the ever-present fear of the master had been removed.

Former slaves who were able to buy their own freedom depicted the emotional transformation of freedom as an affective epiphany that occurred at different points in their purchase. Elizabeth Keckley wrote that as soon as she was told she would be allowed to buy freedom for herself and her son the news felt like a “ray of sunshine,” indicating that she was finally free and “the bitter heart-struggle was over.” Keckley portrayed her emotional change as being mirrored in nature, lyrically describing how after news of her sale: “The earth wore a brighter look, and the very stars seemed to sing

⁶⁵⁷ Solomon Northup seemed to reference this trope when discussing how he felt upon reaching New Orleans, and realizing for the first time since leaving Epps that he was free. Northup recalled that as he arrived in the city “*perhaps* I was not happy – *perhaps* there was no difficulty in restraining myself from dancing round the deck ...and if I didn’t – well, no matter.” Solomon Northup from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin’ On Ole Massa* (1969) 400; Henry Bibb from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin’ On Ole Massa* (1969) 151; For more examples of the trope of transformation see Dr. L.S. Thompson, *The Story of Mattie J. Jackson, A True Story, written and arranged by Dr. L.S. Thompson, As Given By Mattie* (Lawrence: 1866) 28

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 220

with joy.”⁶⁵⁹ Lunsford Lane reported that his feelings were radically altered once the transaction was over, claiming that once “the money was paid to my mistress....I felt that I was free. And a queer and a joyous feeling it is to one who has been a slave.”⁶⁶⁰ Lane explained that the moment the money was exchanged he felt altered, and for the first time “felt...free.” These passages suggest that Lane not only felt “joyous” at being freed, but that liberty made him feel singular emotions that he had not experienced as a slave that were new and “queer” to him. Moses Grandy also emphasized how freedom gave him insight into many unique and previously unknown emotions. For Grandy, who had thrice paid for his freedom, and been twice denied it, his emotional transformation did not come until he held documentation that freedom was truly his. Grandy explained that once he had finally received his “free papers, so that my freedom was quite secure, my feelings were greatly excited,” adding that “Slavery will teach any man to be glad when he gets freedom.”⁶⁶¹

Of course, having one’s freedom bought could also be a complicated emotional experience. Harriet Jacobs recalled that when the family she worked for in New York bought her freedom to ensure her safety, she was “deeply grateful,” but also intensely ambivalent about being purchased. Jacobs observed that though she longed for freedom, she loathed her former master, and resented the idea of reimbursing him for something she believed had “never rightfully belonged to him.” This may have been as rooted in her

⁶⁵⁹ Elizabeth Keckley *Behind the Scenes in the Lincoln White House: Memoirs of an African-American Seamstress*, 21

⁶⁶⁰ Lunsford Lane in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) 17

⁶⁶¹ Grandy first bought his freedom from Mr. Grice for \$600, but his master promptly sold him to a Mr. Trewitt rather than free Grandy. Trewitt agreed to let Grandy work on canal boats to earn his freedom, but after paying Trewitt \$600, the slaveholder sold Grandy to Enoch Sawyer. With the assistance of a sympathetic local man named Captain Minner, Grandy was able to negotiate a loan that he used for his third and final purchase from Sawyer for \$650, for a total of \$1,85 to purchase his own liberty. Moses Grandy in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) 11-16, 19-22, 25

(justifiable) antipathy for Dr. Flint as it was in her political objections to being bought from a system she was opposed to. This may also have been intended to serve as a justification to abolitionist readers who might protest the notion of any money going to a slaveholder, even if it secured Jacobs' freedom. Regardless, Jacobs noted that in spite of her opposition to Flint being paid, she had a visceral emotional reaction to being free, and therefore finally safe. Jacobs admitted that though she "had objected to having my freedom bought....when it was done I felt as if a heavy load had been lifted from my weary shoulders."⁶⁶²

Former slaves may have devoted so much attention to their affective transformations because they truly experienced a moment of emotional epiphany once they became free. This trope may also have been intended to convey the profound impact of freedom, while emphasizing in contrast the affective oppression of slavery.⁶⁶³ But the authors of slave narratives also wrote about the 'moment' of transformation, because it was a subject of great interest to audiences and readers of the era. Steeped in sentimental culture, contemporary readers would have been obsessed with feelings, articulating their own, and reading about those of others, and so they were fascinated by the emotional experience of becoming free.

⁶⁶² Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 163

⁶⁶³ The trope of emotional transformation being linked to freedom from enslavement has since permeated literature. Toni Morrison recalled that after quitting a job in publishing to pursue her writing more intensely, she felt an emotional metamorphosis that was initially difficult to describe, writing that she "knew what fear felt like; this was different. Then it slapped me: I was happy; free in a way I had never been, ever. It was the oddest sensation. Not ecstasy, not satisfaction, not a surfeit of pleasure or accomplishment. It was a purer delight, a rogue anticipation with certainty." This feeling, which she eventually identified as "the shock of liberation" led her to think about what freedom meant to women who had been enslaved. She recalled reading a history of an enslaved woman, Margaret Garner, and from there she began to develop the idea for a book that would become the acclaimed *Beloved*. Acquainted with slave narratives, Toni Morrison felt an emotional revolution, and thought of freedom. Toni Morrison *Beloved* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004 (1987)) xv-xvii

Some authors addressed how popular this topic was, and how difficult it was to answer questions about how it felt to realize freedom. Frederick Douglass remarked in his first autobiography that he had “been frequently asked how I felt when I found myself in a free State,” before adding that he had “never been able to answer the question with any satisfaction to myself.”⁶⁶⁴ Similarly, William Wells Brown noted that in the years since escaping and being harbored by a Quaker family, he had often “been asked how I felt” about being “regarded as a man by a white family; especially just having run away. I cannot say that I have ever answered the question yet.”⁶⁶⁵ Yet both authors tried to convey the moment of feeling free, as did innumerable others. In spite of the trope of an immediate and joyous affective metamorphosis, Brown and Douglass suggested that it was a more complicated process. But the difficulty they had in describing the exactitudes of the change highlighted even further how profound the affective transformation was for enslaved people who reached freedom, and left behind the emotional norms of slavery.

Despite the many narratives that depicted a seemingly rapid and thorough emotional transformation to feeling free, the writings of many former slaves revealed that unlearning the affective norms of slavery took time. Some authors were clear that the initial emotional epiphany that one was free was often followed by a great deal of emotional ambivalence. When Douglass attempted to describe the complicated deluge of feelings he had about freedom, he responded: “It was a moment of the highest excitement I ever experienced,” but this sentiment “very soon subsided; and I was again seized with a feeling of great insecurity and loneliness,” because he realized that he could be returned to slavery, which he claimed tempered this “excitement.” Not only did he realize that he remained

⁶⁶⁴ Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, 93

⁶⁶⁵ Gilbert Osofsky, ed., *Puttin’ On Ole Massa*, 219-220

vulnerable to the reach of slavery, he felt isolated, recalling that after the incipient joy, “loneliness overcame me.” Far from people he loved and trusted he felt that he had no one to turn to, as he could not trust strangers, afraid that one would betray him to the “slave hunters.”⁶⁶⁶ Like Douglass, Harriet Jacobs also found herself simultaneously battling loneliness, and plagued by concerns about whether she could trust people in her new environment. Jacobs was slow to find people she could trust, and even after she had gained more acquaintances she noted that she “well remembered what a desolate feeling it was to be alone among strangers.”⁶⁶⁷ Runaway slaves who reached freedom not only had to adjust to shedding the emotional strictures of slavery, they also had to come to terms with the loss of the loved ones who had provided support throughout enslavement.

Thus for fugitive slaves who found themselves without friends and allies, forging new social networks was crucial to physical and affective survival, though that would require former slaves to learn to trust strangers, including some white strangers. Jacobs claimed “constant feeling of insecurity” plagued her and though she yearned to be able to “confide in” someone her options were limited, as she “had been so deceived by white people that I had lost some confidence in them.”⁶⁶⁸ Whenever she did find people she could dare to “confide in” her relief was palpable. Immediately upon arriving in Philadelphia Jacobs was introduced to a free black minister named Rev. Jeremiah Durham, who took her into his own home until she could safely travel to New York. This initial kindness from the Durham family, and the knowledge that she would soon be in

⁶⁶⁶ Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, 93

⁶⁶⁷ Frederick Douglass reported similar feelings upon reaching the North. Though initially he felt “joyous excitement” upon reaching freedom, “a sense of my loneliness and helplessness crept over me, and covered me with something bordering on despair.” Being in a city only magnified these emotions, as he observed that while “in the midst of thousands of my fellow-men” he was “yet a perfect stranger!” Frederick Douglass *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 249; Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* 131, 157

⁶⁶⁸ Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 138-139

New York, helped to mitigate Jacobs' fears, and she claimed that "that night I sought my pillow with feelings I had never carried to it before. I verily believed myself to be a free woman."⁶⁶⁹

Once in New York, Harriet Jacobs found work as a nurse for the English Mrs. Bruce. Jacobs confessed that she "entered this family with the distrustful feelings I had brought with me out of slavery," but after several months she discovered "that the gentle deportment" of the woman and "her lovely babe were thawing my chilled heart." Gaining trust in the people she was so intimate with had a profound impact on Jacobs' emotional well-being. She claimed that once she began to feel that she could trust the Bruces she "gradually became more energetic and more cheerful." Of course, she remained worried about the safety of her children, so even as she grew more comfortable and happier, she claimed that "the old feeling of insecurity, especially with regard to my children," still haunted her.⁶⁷⁰ Jacobs' work reveals the extent to which the trope of immediate affective transformation belies the lengthy emotional process many fugitive slaves had to undergo to adjust to life outside of bondage, and the affective strictures of slavery. It also hints at the amount of distrust and emotional censorship that people like Jacobs were forced to endure while enslaved.

Of course, for many fugitive slaves emotionally adapting to freedom hinged on the ability to feel safe from the grasp of slavery, and thus free from fear. After learning that Dr. Flint had been informed that she was in the New York, Harriet was told to travel to Boston, since she was no longer "safe in New York."⁶⁷¹ According to Jacobs, "the day after my arrival was one of the happiest of my life," because she was

⁶⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 134

⁶⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 138-139

⁶⁷¹ *ibid.*, 153

reunited with her son and daughter, and she “felt as if I was beyond the reach of the bloodhounds.” But she knew that even this security was temporary, as long as Flint sought her. Jacobs eventually traveled to England with the Bruce family, to serve as their nanny and to evade capture. Once more, Jacobs described a feeling of an emotional renaissance or epiphany. Once they arrived in London she recalled that she “felt as if a great millstone had been lifted from my breast,” as she slept “for the first time, with the delightful consciousness of pure, unadulterated freedom.”⁶⁷² By contrasting the increased safety she felt in Boston, and the full security she experienced in England with how she felt in New York, Jacobs highlighted how much the emotions of fugitive slaves were tied to liberty, and how much fear stifled affective freedom.

Because runaway slaves often sensed that they would always feel vulnerable to the clutches of slavery while on American soil, many authors of slave narratives claimed that they did not feel free, or emotionally transformed, until they were in a country which had abolished slavery entirely, like England or Canada, even before the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act. David Barrett escaped bondage in Kentucky first by reaching Ohio, but he reported in an 1837 interview that it wasn’t until he reached Canada that he felt free, and emotionally altered, claiming that once he “planted my feet upon British ground...my fears left me and my shackles fell!”⁶⁷³ Similarly, Peter Smith, who had been enslaved in Tennessee, did not feel secure until he reached Canada, “a land of safety,” which gave him the “feeling that there is more protection for him under the lion’s paw than the eagle’s wings.”⁶⁷⁴ Levi Douglass was living in Canada as a farmer, now able to,

⁶⁷² *ibid*, 148-149

⁶⁷³ David Barrett interview in John Blassingame *Slave Testimony*, 189, 198

⁶⁷⁴ Peter Smith in John Blassingame *Slave Testimony*, 245. For more on not feeling safe until reaching Canada see Levi Douglass and James Wright in John Blassingame *Slave Testimony*, 304

according to his 1853 interviewer, “sit under the shelter of his own roof, ‘none daring to make him afraid.’”⁶⁷⁵ This suggests that freedom was defined not only by owning property, but by emotional liberty, in particular the ability to be free from fear.⁶⁷⁶

Any feelings of safety and emotional freedom that runaway slaves might have had would disappear with the arrival of the Fugitive Slave Act, which had a distinct and immediate chilling effect on the affective lives of fugitives. Those who might formerly have begun to feel trust and joy in freedom were now flooded with fear and anxiety. An article in the Boston abolitionist paper *Liberty Bell* mentioned the emotional climate in an 1850 meeting held in Faneuil Hall shortly after the law’s passing. According to the author, this meeting was attended by a number of “poor fugitives” who were “frightened, trembling...living in a state of mind bordering on distraction.”⁶⁷⁷ Harriet Jacobs described how the bill impacted runaways harbored in New York. While she already felt some trepidation about her status as a fugitive prior to the law, she claimed that her “feeling of insecurity” was “now greatly increased by the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law.” She claimed that the law meant that fugitive slaves were now “condemned to live in such incessant fear,” as the constant threat of recapture governed her emotions. Jacobs recalled that after returning from England she “lived in a state of anxiety,” and “dreaded” the coming summer, when she feared Flint would return to the city to look for her. These fears turned her into a prisoner once more, as she woefully observed that she could not “go out to breathe God’s free air without trepidation at my heart.”⁶⁷⁸ By denying runaways emotional liberty, and returning them to a state of fear, the Fugitive Slave Act

⁶⁷⁵ Levi Douglass and James Wright in John Blassingame *Slave Testimony*, 304

⁶⁷⁶ For more examples of the emotional transformation moment happening upon reaching Canada see Josiah Henson *The life of Josiah Henson: formerly a slave, now an inhabitant of Canada*, 58-59

⁶⁷⁷ Edinbur Randall in John Blassingame *Slave Testimony*, 320

⁶⁷⁸ Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 155-159

effectively extended the spatial parameters of the affective strictures of slavery. While Jacobs was freed not long after, for many fugitives, emotional security would not be fully restored until the spring of 1865.

Some enslaved people linked their emotional transition not to the war itself, but to the realization of the Emancipation Proclamation at the war's end. Lizzie Gibson claimed that as a slave in Virginia "the war came and went without my feeling it in the least. Then came Emancipation," which she suggested filled free people with joy. More importantly, they could express this jubilation "without being afraid," no longer forced to censor and suppress their emotions.⁶⁷⁹ Like authors who portrayed their emotional transformation as a spontaneous epiphany, Jacob Stroyer described the entire "spring of 1865" as though it were one joyful day, writing of that time that "the mocking birds and jays sing this morning more sweetly than ever before."⁶⁸⁰ Historians have also traditionally depicted the end of the Civil War as a time of collective emotional transformation. W.E.B. Du Bois observed that it was actually "difficult to write of this period calmly, so intense was the feeling, so mighty the human passions that swayed and blinded men."⁶⁸¹ Tera Hunter claimed that these feelings could also be strongly ambivalent, and that for former slaves, Emancipation "inspired somber reflection," as well as "foot-stomping church meetings, and joyous street parades."⁶⁸²

The aftermath of war was also a time of emotional upheaval for former slaveholders. Whites responses to defeat and the post-war racial landscape were often couched in

⁶⁷⁹ Jacob Stroyer used similar language to explain the affective experience of the war's end, declaring that "at last came freedom. And what joy it brought!" Jacob Stroyer in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) 99; Lizzie Gibson in John W. Blassingame *Slave Testimony*, 738-739

⁶⁸⁰ Jacob Stroyer in *Five Slave Narratives: A Compendium* (1968) 99

⁶⁸¹ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1999) 27

⁶⁸² Tera W. Hunter *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War*, 21

affective terms by whites. This suggests that they saw Emancipation and the end of the war not only as a military, political and economic loss; it was also a blow to Southern feelings and their cherished emotional norms and practices. Without these strictures former slaveholders were uncertain of how to emotionally respond to their former slaves, and what lay in store for the future of interracial affective relations. According to W.E.B. Du Bois, the end of the war devastated the slaveholding class, as those who had once been masters became a “blighted, ruined form, with hate in his eyes.”⁶⁸³ Union soldiers stationed in the South observed similar feelings. In the spring of 1865 Col. Elias Wright voiced “concern over the sentiments” of North Carolina whites, who he claimed “regret” the ending of slavery, and therefore “deplore the presence of free negroes.”⁶⁸⁴ White Southerners didn’t just seem to be angry or resentful towards former slaves, they seemed somehow ashamed at having to interact with free blacks outside of the strictures of slavery. A July 1868 article in the *Macon Telegraph* expressed “outrage” over a rally held by free people of color for several Republican candidates, which it described saying: “A more humiliating scene was never witnessed.”⁶⁸⁵

Many Southern whites were also concerned with how free blacks felt about *them*, fearing that freedom might enable former slaves to enact their long-held vengeance. Northern officer Col. Elias Wright wrote that the whites in North Carolina in the month following Lee’s surrender “very much fear ‘servile insurrection,’” while author Dr. Josiah

⁶⁸³ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1999) 27; For more on feelings of white “racial resentment” see Shane White and Graham White *Stylin’: African American Expressive Culture From Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998) 128

⁶⁸⁴ From Report of Wright, May 29, 1865 Governors’ Papers, William W. Holden, North Carolina Division of Archives and History; John David Smith *An Old Creed For the New South: Proslavery Ideology and Historiography, 1865-1918* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2008) 17-18

⁶⁸⁵ Shane White and Graham White *Stylin’*, 136

Nott predicted that race war was imminent.⁶⁸⁶ Social relations were still so charged in South Carolina in 1868 that Elizabeth Hyde Botume remarked warily that during that period “We seemed to be living over a volcano.”⁶⁸⁷ According to John Hope Franklin, Southern whites’ “wild, nightmarish fear” of slave rebellions only intensified after the war’s end. Franklin even attributed these paranoid fears to unresolved emotional issues, claiming that slaveholders’ crippling anxieties about impending rebellion stemmed from their own “sense of guilt and despair.”⁶⁸⁸ Whether or not one can speculate that former masters as a class were plagued by “guilt” over their slaveholding past, it is evident from the writing of former masters that they understood Emancipation as an affective revolution, and one that they took very personally.

Some white Southerners bemoaned the affective changes they saw in their former slaves. Ryland Randolph, a former master and Alabama newspaper editor, declared in 1869 that “Negroes, as bondsmen, were happier....than they are now.” He bemoaned the fact that former slaves were now prone to “grumble,” and “generally” seen with “grim countenances.”⁶⁸⁹ Charles Manigault also romanticized the affective relations of slavery and the feelings of the enslaved, complaining that once enslaved people were free “their heads and hearts are turned against us, their former protectors and friends.”⁶⁹⁰ This was clearly a shift that many former slaveholders had to come to terms with. After a former slave talked

⁶⁸⁶ From Report of Wright, May 29, 1865 Governors’ Papers, William W. Holden, North Carolina Division of Archives and History; John David Smith *An Old Creed For the New South*, 17-18; Dr. Josiah C. Nott *The Negro Race: Its Ethnology and History* (Mobile, 1866)

⁶⁸⁷ Elizabeth Hyde Botume *First Days Amongst the Contrabands* (Boston, 1893) 267- 289

⁶⁸⁸ John Hope Franklin *Reconstruction After the Civil War*, 2nd edition, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994) 3, 6, 93-97; For more on fears of uprisings by free blacks see Eric Foner *Reconstruction* (1988) 121-122

⁶⁸⁹ Ryland Rudolph quoted in John David Smith *An Old Creed For the New South*, 18-19; See also John David Smith *An Old Creed For the New South*, 25

⁶⁹⁰ Charles Manigault “Respecting Slavery” quoted in John David Smith *An Old Creed For the New South*, 52

back to her, Susan Bradford felt “hurt and dazed,” claiming that “Never before had I a word of impudence from any of our black folks.” The change in free people’s demeanor may have “hurt” her, but it also made her realize the extent of the revolution that had taken place around her. By responding to her with such impudence, the free woman seemingly forced Bradford to come to terms with the end of slavery, conceding that her servants were now “free....free to do as they pleased.”⁶⁹¹

John David Smith hints that white Southerners were unprepared for the abrupt end of the emotional strictures of slavery, so when they “stopped acting like slaves, their former masters experienced new feelings of hopelessness, and betrayal.”⁶⁹² Eugene Genovese quoted a slave who described his owner’s shock when he left the plantation after staying for the duration of the war, recalling that the planter said “Now I ain’t got no confidence in you.”⁶⁹³ This suggests that former slaveholders’ fears of disloyalty might have been linked to their concerns that the politics of trust, and negotiations of loyalty that existed under slavery no longer worked as a system for maintaining social control. There were a number of reasons why slaveholders depicted their feelings at the end of slavery in terms of loss, and betrayal, rather than anger. Doing so placed the blame for any change in affective relations squarely on former slaves. Of course, acting hurt over this change also enabled slaveholders to preserve their carefully crafted image of themselves as benevolent figures.

According to Eric Foner, the conflicts former slaveholders were feeling through and about emotions were understandable, as the “day-to-day encounters between the race became infused with the tension inevitable when a social order, with its established power relations and commonly understood rules of conduct” is destroyed, and has yet to

⁶⁹¹ Susan Bradford Eppes *Through Some Eventful Years* (University of Michigan Library, 1926) 283

⁶⁹² John David Smith *An Old Creed For the New South*, 26

⁶⁹³ Eugene D. Genovese *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, (1976) 98, 111

be replaced.⁶⁹⁴ Now that the “commonly understood rules” and affective norms of slavery had been dissolved with Emancipation, former slaves and slaveholders were at odds over determining the new “social order” of the South, what the emotional norms would be, and what would be expected of the affective relations between former masters and free people. In the meantime, Foner was correct, and “tension” arose as the affective norms of the South remained in flux.

Slave narratives suggest that many former slaves yearned to let their former masters know that they had cast off the affective relations of slavery. After escaped slave Henry Bibb’s three brothers, Granville, John and Lewis Bibb, ran away together, the Bibb brothers delighted in the fact that doing so insured that the slaveholding family that had profited off of the Bibb’s “unrequited toil” were now “left...without a single slave.” They observed in an interview with Henry that their escape had brought great “joy” to the Bibb family, while they speculated gleefully that their former master’s “heart has been filled with grief over the loss of slaves.”⁶⁹⁵ Those who had escaped from slavery often wanted to emphasize to their former masters how happy they were to be free, with James Madison excited to let his former master know that Madison was “now living in the enjoyment of liberty.”⁶⁹⁶ Similarly, upon reaching freedom William Wells Brown longed to tell his friends and family who remained in bondage that “I was free!” But he also express his desire to inform his owners about the turn of events, noting that he was “anxious” to tell his former mistress “that she must get another coachman.”⁶⁹⁷ Brown was being humorous, but he clearly wanted to let his master know he was no longer a

⁶⁹⁴ Eric Foner *Reconstruction* (1988) 123

⁶⁹⁵ Granville, John and Lewis Bibb in John Blassingame *Slave Testimony*, 286

⁶⁹⁶ James Madison in John Blassingame *Slave Testimony*, 267

⁶⁹⁷ William Wells Brown from Edt Gilbert Osofsky *Puttin' On Ole Massa* (1969) 220

slave, and that the affective norms and strictures of slavery no longer applied to him. Furthermore, Brown's remarks hinted that former slaves not only experienced an emotional change upon becoming free, they wanted their masters to know that this transformation had taken place.

In the years following the war, free people would work to instill in former masters that the affective relations they had, and the emotional strictures that had formed the backbone of their daily interactions, had been irrevocably altered. Free people highlighted the affective revolution that was taking place throughout the South in a number of ways. A former slaveholder who lived near Mary Chesnut remarked that after the war he visited the former slaves on his Beaufort plantation. He reported that they "were delighted to see me and treated me with overflowing affection," but they also stated "firmly and respectfully" to him that "we own this land now."⁶⁹⁸ The former slaves' "affection" paired with "firm...and respectful" claims of ownership emphasized that their affective display had not changed, but the social relations had.

Sent to mediate the interactions between former masters and slaves, members of the Freedmen's Bureau were deeply invested in the post-war affective relationships of black and white Southerners. However, various members of the bureau had very different perceptions of the state of interracial relations in the South, and thus widely diverging notions of how to ameliorate social conditions. Appointed to head the Prince George County, Virginia branch of the bureau, Charles H. Burd observed that in Petersburg, "the feeling between the white citizens and the freedmen is very good, and they seem

⁶⁹⁸ *Mary Chesnut's Civil War* (1981) 827

mutually to understand and appreciate each other's distress."⁶⁹⁹ He even dismissed claims that black codes were being used to prosecute and imprison former slaves, declaring of a recent trial of freed men that he was "pleased to state that no feeling against them as colored persons was exhibited," rather the men received what he believed to be a fair trial.⁷⁰⁰ General Rufus Saxton was less optimistic about the future of former masters and slaves in South Carolina and Georgia. When Saxton was brought before the Joint Committee on Reconstruction in 1866, to discuss "the disposition" of black and white Southerners, Saxton testified that relations between former masters and slaves were tense, and unlikely to improve quickly. He claimed that those who had owned slaves did not truly "know" their former slaves, because "the system of slavery has been one of concealment on the part of the negro of all his feelings and his impulses." Saxton claimed that the instinct to lie was "ingrained" in those who had been in bondage, and that this would have far-reaching implications for future labor negotiations, because "the freedman has no faith in his former master, nor has his former owner any faith in the capacity of the freedmen." As a result, Saxton woefully noted that "a mutual distrust exists between them." Saxton hinted that it would take a great deal of time to dismantle this "distrust," as it was woven into the fabric of the affective relations that were reinforced through daily interactions.⁷⁰¹ Other observers recognized that an emotional reconciliation was necessary if any social progress was to occur. One South Carolina man wrote to another in 1867 that Southern whites had to cease giving "hard words and

⁶⁹⁹ Originally in Charles H. Burd Reports of Operations and Conditions, 31 March 1866, BRFAL, Records of the Asst. Commissioner for Virginia, M1048, reel 45, quoted in Scott Reynolds Nelson *Steel Drivin' Man: John Henry, the Untold Story of an American Legend* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) 50

⁷⁰⁰ Charles H. Burd to Capt. Stuart Barnes, 1 June 1866, BRFAL, records of the asst. commissioner for Virginia, M1048, reel 44, quoted in Scott Reynolds Nelson *Steel Drivin' Man* (2008) 57

⁷⁰¹ *Report of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction*, 39th Congress., First Session (Washington, 1866) Part III, 101-102

frowning looks” to former slaves in order to move forward socially and economically, (and stave off vengeance-fueled violence.)⁷⁰²

But many former masters were not willing to give up their resentment in favor of reconciliation. William Samford of Alabama placed the blame for any change in the affective climate on former slaves, writing in 1866 that “in spite of the most earnest efforts of their old masters to conciliate and satisfy them, the estrangement between the races increases in its extent and bitterness.”⁷⁰³ Other white Southerners seemed to take the actions of free people as personal and affective affronts. Planter William Elliot wrote to his mother to complain about the comportment of slaves as he tried to negotiate their labor on his South Carolina plantation. He described one man, Jacob, as “indifferent” to work, an attitude that Elliot attributed to Jacob being “eaten up with self-esteem and selfishness.”⁷⁰⁴ Samford and Elliot were quick to identify how the feelings of free blacks had changed, but it is unclear if they realized the impact this affective transformation had on their own feelings.

The perception that former slaves were “bitter” or “selfish” could have dramatic consequences, and lead to charged interactions between former masters and former slaves. One white man from Mississippi recalled an 1868 incident between Judge Henry Calhoon and a hired freedman. The man explained that the judge “had occasion to reprimand” a free black man for not attending to his work, when the worker responded that “he was a free man now” and he would never again take orders from “any white

⁷⁰² November 24, 1867, Nickels Holmes Papers, Duke University

⁷⁰³ George Petrie “William F. Samford, Statesmen and Man of Letters,” *Transactions of the Alabama Historical Society*, 4 (June 1902), 479-81, quoted in Michael J. Cassity *Legacy of Fear: American Race Relations to 1900* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985) 130-31

⁷⁰⁴ William Elliott letter, March 25, 1866, Elliott-Gonzalez Papers, 1009, Southern Historical Collection, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

man.” According to the witness, “the judge was indignant at the negro’s insolence, and especially his manner.” Calhoon threatened to whip him with his riding crop, and the free man responded by raising his hoe. The conflict came to an end when the judge’s son announced that in spite of the free man’s work contract that he would shoot the former slave if he did not leave the Calhoon estate at once.⁷⁰⁵ This scene speaks volumes about how former slaveholders and slaves were navigating the radically altered social relations and affective terrain of the post-war South. It is notable that the judge perceived the free man to be “insolen(t),” and that this should provoke him to be “indignant.” Calhoon seemed confounded by the man’s unchecked display of emotions, and sought to discipline him for this expression of improper emotions. Meanwhile, the worker was clearly rejecting the affective norms imposed by slavery, refusing to feign deference and suppress anger any longer.

Some former slaves were well aware of how much planters hoped to maintain the emotional strictures and practices of slavery, and may have exploited their former masters’ desires for those affective norms to return. In July of 1865 a free woman named Isabella Sousten wrote to her former master, confessing that though she had run away during the war she longed to return to his home, for a number of reasons. Her appeal was couched in the affective language of paternalism, as she claimed that she wanted to return to her “Affectionate Master” because “no one ceares for me” in Virginia, where she had been since she escaped. Isabella indicated not only that her former master was “affectionate,” and had cared for her, she hinted that these feelings were mutual, as she asked him to send her “love to all of my friends, and especially to my young mistress,”

⁷⁰⁵ W.H. Hardy, “Recollections of Reconstruction in East and Southeast Mississippi,” *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society*, 7 (1903,) 199-203, quoted in Michael J. Cassity *Legacy of Fear*, 147-148

and signed the letter “your most affectionate humble friend and servant.”⁷⁰⁶ It is unknown from this document why she wished to return to her former master, if it stemmed from economic reasons, or from missing her “friends” and loved ones. Whether these emotions were genuine or performed, it is clear that Isabella knew that her best hope of being allowed to return after running away was to appeal to the supposed affective ties of slavery, and hinting that those relations would remain in place.

Other free people employed affective language with their former masters, but in doing so emphasized how much their relationship had irrevocably changed. After planter Colonel Anderson wrote to his former slave, Jourdan Anderson, to ask him to return to his plantation in Tennessee to work, Jourdan Anderson responded with a letter that used the language of endearment to negotiate terms of labor. Jourdan Anderson sent his “love” to the Colonel’s family, and told him that he had been “proud...to call him master.” But immediately following this complement Jourdan Anderson got down to business, writing “Now if you will write and say what wages you will give me,” he would consider “whether it would be to my advantage to move back again.”⁷⁰⁷ In this way Anderson signaled that the master was now an employer, and the man who had once been “proud” to be his slave was now a free laborer, and in a position to haggle with him over wages.

Of course, though free people like Jourdan Anderson knew that much had changed with the coming of Emancipation, they also feared that some of the emotional politics of slavery remained staunchly in place on the plantations of their former masters. In his August 1865 letter to the Colonel Jourdan Anderson claimed he “was glad” that his

⁷⁰⁶ Isabella L. Sousten to Master Manual, July 10, 1865, in Edward Coles Collection, University of Virginia Library, quoted in Michael J. Cassity *Legacy of Fear*, 145-146

⁷⁰⁷ Jourdan Anderson to Colonel P.H. Anderson, August, 7, 1865, Lydia Maria Child *The Freedmen’s Book* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1866) 265

former master wanted Jourdan and his family to return to his plantation, but admitted that he “felt uneasy about you,” in part because the slaveholder had shot at Jourdan Anderson as he fled the Colonel’s plantation. Jourdan Anderson mentioned that his wife, Mandy, was particularly “afraid” of returning to Tennessee “without some proof” that their former master was “disposed to treat us justly and kindly.” In order to “test” his “sincerity,” Jourdan Anderson requested that his former master pay them for their years of labor, plus interest, assuring him that such an act would help them “forgive old scores,” and restore their confidence in him. However, if the Colonel refused to compensate them for their years of work, then they would not return, for they would “have little faith in your promises in the future.” Though he then signed the letter “from your old servant,” Jourdan Anderson was clear that he did not trust his former master, and that any relationship they had in the future would be vastly different from the affective and labor relations of slavery.⁷⁰⁸ In doing so Jourdan Anderson highlighted the choices free men had when their employers could not be trusted, choices that had often not existed for the enslaved.

Of course, it was not as easy for all free people to dicker with their former masters about working conditions and wages. Lorenzo Ivy, a slave in Virginia, was sixteen when the Civil War ended, in the middle of the growing season. At the end of the war Ivy’s former master announced that if any former slaves remained on the plantation to harvest the “crop of corn and wheat and tobacco” then he would pay them. In spite of his claim, Ivy explained that “most” of his former slaves did not stay, because “they said they knew him too well” to

⁷⁰⁸ Jourdan Anderson emphasized how little he should trust the Colonel with his closing remarks, asking the Colonel at the end of the letter to thank a man named George Carter for him, explaining that he wished to express his gratitude to Carter for “taking the pistol from” the Colonel “when you were shooting at me.” In this way Jourdan Anderson reminded his master that he had much to “forgive.” Jourdan Anderson to Colonel P.H. Anderson, August, 7, 1865, Lydia Maria Child *The Freedmen’s Book* (1866) 265

trust his promises. Ivy observed that they had made a wise choice, for though his family stayed to farm, the planter did not pay them. He recalled that they completed the work in late November, only to have the planter deny them any share of the profits for the harvest, before ordering them to leave his plantation.⁷⁰⁹

Emphasizing to former masters that the affective relations and strictures of the Antebellum South were no more was just one way that free blacks worked to cast off the emotional norms of slavery. According to Eric Foner, "Blacks relished opportunities to flaunt their liberation from the innumerable regulations, significant and trivial, associated with slavery," including, I would argue, the affective strictures of slavery.⁷¹⁰ One way that free people challenged the emotional practices and norms of slavery was in their efforts, post-emancipation, to locate loved ones who had been sold or ran away. According to Tera Hunter, some former slaves sought the aid of the Freedmen's Bureau in finding loved ones who had been sold away or lost before or during the war.⁷¹¹ In his history of Reconstruction Eric Foner notes that though these searches were not always successful, the efforts by free people to locate family are nonetheless revealing. He argues that attempts to find lost loved ones highlight that the family had been a cherished institution for slaves, albeit one that "had always been vulnerable to disruptions." Now able to search for loved ones who had been scattered by sale or escape, Foner claims that "Emancipation allowed blacks to reaffirm and solidify their family connections, and most freedmen seized the opportunity with alacrity."⁷¹² Years of forced separations and

⁷⁰⁹ Lorenzo Ivy in John W. Blassingame *Slave Testimony*, 736-737

⁷¹⁰ Eric Foner *Reconstruction* (1988) 79

⁷¹¹ Tera W. Hunter *To 'Joy My Freedom* (1997) 1, 20; For more on former slaves' efforts to reunite with family and friends see Eric Foner *Reconstruction* (1988) 78, 82-84

⁷¹² Eric Foner *Reconstruction* (1988) 84

heartbreak could not be undone, but by prioritizing tracking down family free people showed that they hoped to right some of the affective cruelties of slavery.

Tera Hunter argues that the desire to fully experience the joy of freedom was in evidence in the many life choices free women of color made post-emancipation, and in how they defined their liberty. According to Hunter, “Black women were determined to make freedom mean the opportunity to find pleasure and relaxation with friends, family, and neighbors.” After years in bondage in which they “had been governed by rules and regulations over which they had no control,” Hunter argues that for free women, freedom meant emotional liberty, and the right to actively pursue happiness, alongside other political rights and economic opportunities.⁷¹³ Not content only to seek out employers who would negotiate fair wages and terms of labor, free people of color sought emotional fulfillment as well as financial security.

Following the war, free people also derived pleasure from the many spaces and activities that had been denied to them as slaves. Eric Foner claimed that being able to travel freely “would long remain a source of pride and excitement for former slaves.”⁷¹⁴ But former slaves were not only taking advantage of their enhanced mobility, they were also finding other ways to express themselves openly in public spaces in order to challenge the censorship and circumscription that had characterized the emotional norms of slavery. Shane and Graham White argue that public acts of joy by free people were indicative of how “blacks probed the boundaries of their freedom.”⁷¹⁵ But what former

⁷¹³ Based on the *American Missionary*, March 1866, p. 65, quoted in Tera W. Hunter *To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997) 3

⁷¹⁴ Eric Foner *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (1988) 80

⁷¹⁵ Shane White and Graham White *Stylin’: African American Expressive Culture From Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit*, 127

slaves understood to be resistance to the years of emotional censorship and coerced affective performances they were forced to endure in bondage, white Southerners saw as an open threat, and an omen of social issues to come.

White observers expressed a great deal of shock and anger over public displays of joy or pride by free blacks. An Irish female visitor observed while traveling in Charleston not long after the war that “the colored persons are awful sassy.”⁷¹⁶ A Virginia newspaper reported in 1866 that the town of Petersburg was beset by black soldiers who were said to “strut through this improvised town with an air of evident satisfaction. They feel the importance” of their contribution to the civil war, and the shaping of postwar society, and this feeling of “importance” was allegedly clear “in every tone and action.” The same paper would later accuse black people of showing an “air of satisfaction” over the end of the war and slavery.⁷¹⁷ True or not, this article suggests that any “satisfaction” or pride in their “importance” on the part of free people of color was seen as somehow disloyal or inherently inappropriate, and tantamount to delighting in the misery of slaveholding whites. This hints at an idea that many white Southerners would express, that black joy came at white expense. This was evident in Elizabeth Hyde Botume’s description of the heightened racial tensions she experienced as she traveled through South Carolina in 1868. Botume remarked that it was “an interesting study to watch the exultant faces of the Negroes, and the scowling faces of the rebels.” To an observer like Botume, the two went hand in hand, the joy of former slaves translated into anger and

⁷¹⁶ Shane White and Graham White *Stylin’: African American Expressive Culture From Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit*, 129

⁷¹⁷ Petersburg *Daily Index* March 1, 1866, quoted in Scott Reynolds Nelson *Steel Drivin’ Man: John Henry, the Untold Story of an American Legend*, 44, 52

resentment for supporters of the slave South.⁷¹⁸ According to Shane and Graham White, “the hostility” in white reactions revealed just how concerned they were about the shifts in power taking place around them. Every act of joy, pride or impudence by a free person of color highlighted how much had changed, and how uncertain the future of Southern society seemed to be.⁷¹⁹

The writing of Southern whites suggest that they took particular umbrage at public displays of joy or pride by free blacks, especially the pleasure people of color took in clothing, and the parades meant to celebrate the end of the war. Some white observers seemed to see clothing as an affective signifier, and were enraged by what they saw. Southern newspaper editors wrote critically of all free men of color who appeared in Union uniforms.⁷²⁰ Tera Hunter cited a white woman named Abbie Brooks who claimed that free black women’s fancy dress and proud “swaggering air” were enough to “inspire the most casual observer with a feeling of contempt” for them.⁷²¹ Black people in fine or stylish clothing were viewed as enough of a threat to some whites in Georgia that former slave Lewis Favor reported that “White men cut the clothes from the backs of ex-slaves” if they were deemed to be “well-dressed” (i.e., too “well-dressed” for a black person).⁷²² In the years following the war even the sartorial choices of black individuals became freighted with political and emotional meaning. In their work on African American expressive culture Shane and Graham White argue that seeing Blacks in “smart and neat”

⁷¹⁸ Elizabeth Hyde Botume *First Days Amongst the Contrabands* (Boston, 1893) 267- 289

⁷¹⁹ Lewis Favor from W.P.A. interview from George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, vol. 12, Georgia narratives, quoted in Shane White and Graham White *Stylin’: African American Expressive Culture From Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit*, 127-128

⁷²⁰ For example, see Petersburg *Daily Index* March 1, 1866, quoted in Scott Reynolds Nelson *Steel Drivin’ Man*, 44, 52

⁷²¹ Tera W. Hunter *To ‘Joy My Freedom*, 2-3

⁷²² Lewis Favor from W.P.A. interview from George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, vol. 12, Georgia narratives, quoted in Shane White and Graham White *Stylin’*, 127-128, 301

clothing, “their bodies moving pridefully,” also challenged and provoked whites because it served as “a stark visual repudiation of the effacement of human worth” that bolstered the institution of slavery.⁷²³

While enslaved people may have taken pride and pleasure in dress and bodily representation after years of affective and physical oppression, many whites viewed these choices as calculated to hurt white feelings. According to Shane and Graham White, after Lee’s surrender “the spectacle of young African-American women donning black veils....aroused particular hostility,” because such veils were viewed by white Southerners as “painful symbols...of white bereavement.”⁷²⁴ Perhaps young black Southern women were mocking the angst white Southerners felt about surrender, and the end of slavery, or perhaps they wanted the right to experiment with clothing, and dress in styles that had been denied to them while in slavery. Of course, the veils, nice suits and uniforms of free blacks not only reminded whites of what they had lost, they were seen as portending the future. According to Hunter, to people like Brooks, black “style symbolized the threat of black domination” which many whites feared was on the horizon.⁷²⁵

Shane and Graham White assert that in addition to clothing, free blacks also used public events like parades to display pride and joy in order to “refute the bodily regime imposed upon them by whites.”⁷²⁶ I would argue that these performative uses of clothes and public spaces were also intended to challenge the affective strictures of slavery. The parades and celebrations held by free people of color challenged the emotional norms of slavery in a number of ways. A Charleston parade on March 21, 1865 highlighted the mix

⁷²³ Shane White and Graham White *Stylin’*, 131

⁷²⁴ Ibid, 127, 131

⁷²⁵ Tera W. Hunter *To ‘Joy My Freedom*, 2-3

⁷²⁶ Shane White and Graham White *Stylin’*, 127

of emotions free people were feeling about the end of slavery. A reporter from the *New York Times* described the free people's parade, "gotten up in honor of their liberation from slavery," as "large and enthusiastic," with crowds of roughly "4,000" people. Two "features of the procession" were especially interesting to the reporter. The first was a tableau staged on the back of a cart of two black women being sold at auction by a man "ringing a bell and shouting 'how much am I offered?'" According to the reporter "this cart was followed by another, on which was placed a coffin covered with a black pall, the inscription 'Slavery is dead' appearing on each side of the cart." This "mock hearse" was followed by "a long train of female mourners," dressed in dark garb. The reporter for the *Times* did not understand why they appeared as so somber, saying "we should naturally suppose that the colored people would not be greatly afflicted with grief after having been assured of their freedom."⁷²⁷ What the reporter missed was the complicated emotions produced at the dawn of freedom. Though enslaved people were generally overjoyed at the advent of Emancipation, mourning slavery did not necessarily indicate nostalgia for slavery, but rather a desire to commemorate the sorrows of slavery, including the loss of loved ones by death or sale at the auction block.

Moreover, the tableaux may have been deliberately intended to provoke the emotions of whites that *were* grieving over the loss of slavery. As Shane and Graham White point out, "Parades of this kind were richly symbolic," and though framed as an event for collective rejoicing, meant to represent and build "black unity and pride," they could also be intended to have "an element of provocation."⁷²⁸ And provoke they did. The *Times* journalist was struck by the reaction of the white parade spectators, observing that

⁷²⁷ "Affairs at Charleston" *New York Times* (March 30, 1865) 3

⁷²⁸ Shane White and Graham White *Stylin'*, 134-135, 128

“the expression on the countenances of many” in the crowd showed that the events of the parade were “not altogether agreeable” to them, though he noted that “they wisely swallowed objections.”⁷²⁹ The mourning women may have been earnestly commemorating the slaves who had not lived to see freedom, or loved ones they lost to death or sale. Or the coffin scene may have been designed to mock white feelings about Emancipation. According to Shane and Graham White, by “Pretending sorrow where they felt only joy” free people “offered a straight-faced, parodic representation of white grief” over the end of slavery.”⁷³⁰ In doing so they highlighted the extent to which white feelings were based on slavery, while also emphasizing the performative nature of emotions, perhaps giving further weight to white anxieties that their slaves’ supposed contentment and affection had been feigned all along.

Parades and other celebrations of freedom didn’t just function as displays of black jubilation, or as opportunities to provoke or challenge whites, they were also served as venues for deconstructing the emotional norms and rituals of slavery. This was especially clear in post-war celebrations of January 1, the date the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect in 1863. Though few slaves were initially freed by the proclamation, many free blacks later chose to celebrate this day over others, with Frederick Douglass declaring that “the fourth of July was great, but the first of January, when we consider it in all its relations and bearings is incomparably greater.”⁷³¹ Of course, for former slaves the first day of the year had long held a great deal of meaning. As the day that leases of slaves began, historian Mitch Kachun explains that January first was “traditionally a day to be dreaded by the slaves,” as it signaled “the end of the brief

⁷²⁹ “Affairs at Charleston” *New York Times* (March 30, 1865) 3

⁷³⁰ Shane White and Graham White *Stylin’*, 132

⁷³¹ Frederick Douglass “January First, 1863” *Douglass’ Monthly*, January, 1863

Christmas holiday season” and a possible “separation of loved ones.” As a result, some slaves called the first of the year “heartbreak day.”⁷³² Thus celebrating freedom on the largely symbolic date of the proclamation was a conscious reclamation of the day, intended to alter its emotional connotations. In a sermon on January 1, 1866, A.M.E. preacher Henry McNeal Turner declared that what was once “the most bitter day of the year to our poor miserable race, shall henceforth and forever be filled with acclamations of the wildest joy, and expressions of ecstasy.”⁷³³ By redefining the first as a day of exuberant “joy” rather than a day of sorrow, former slaves were taking proactive steps to dismantle the affective practices of slavery, and their temporal associations.

White reactions to such parades and celebrations hinted that whites not only felt challenged by the loss of the emotional norms and practices of slavery, but that they felt particularly threatened when black joy was enacted. In an 1868 article in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* Harriet Prescott Spofford detailed a recent “celebration of emancipation” in Washington D.C. Though Spofford lauded the participants for “marching” in a “serious and stately” fashion, her other descriptions of the seemed to contradict this praise. Spofford claimed that the celebration brought “an endless black cloud,” or “mob” to the city, “the throngs that compose it frolicking in exuberance and effervescence that know no bounds.” While she could admit that the celebrants were “serious and stately,” her comments also insinuated that there was something threatening about black joy, that such collective “effervescence” turned the participants into an

⁷³² Mitch Kachun *Festivals of Freedom*, 118

⁷³³ Henry McNeal Turner “On the Anniversary of Emancipation” (1866), *Respect Black: the Writings and Speeches of Henry McNeal Turner*, ed. Edwin S. Redkey (New York: Arno Press, 1971) 5-6

unindividuated “black cloud” or “mob.” Her wording also hinted that people of color could not control their emotions, for their feelings “know no bounds.”⁷³⁴

The idea that black joy was a threat was rooted in the idea that black people delighted in white suffering, and thus black rejoicing was synonymous with white sorrow. As early as the autumn of 1861, some residents of South Carolina observed an immediate effect on the feelings and affective behavior of the local slaves as Union soldiers began to attack the Carolina coast. Mary Chesnut mentioned a friend, John DeSaussure, who was “in a state of abject fright” when his slaves “show(ed) such exultation” at the Union attack on Port Royal. Chesnut seemed shaken by her friend’s abrupt loss of his own “gaiety,” but she countered that she had not observed “any change” in the slaves around her.”⁷³⁵ Though Chesnut had yet to see a “change,” her friend’s evident “fright” hints that the “exultation” of slaves was not only something to fear, it was believed to be in direct opposition to the interests and joy of slaveholders. Planters continued to see black joy as a threat in the wake of war, in part because it was seen in direct conflict with white profits. In his diary, lawyer David Schenck complained in 1865 that as former slaves were “going through this preliminary enjoyment” of freedom “the crops are suffering.”⁷³⁶

Aware that many white Southerners believed that celebrations of freedom were venues for free blacks to delight in white suffering, free blacks in Richmond printed and distributed a broadside in advance of a April 1866 celebration in order to “respectfully inform the public that THEY DO NOT INTEND to celebrate the failure of the

⁷³⁴ Harriet Prescott Spofford “The Streets of Washington,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, Vol. 37, Issue 21, (August 1868) 414

⁷³⁵ *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War* (1981) 233; For more on slaves expressing joy about arrival of Northern troops see *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, 415

⁷³⁶ David Schenck Diary, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Confederacy.”⁷³⁷ It is unclear if former Confederates took this to heart, but notable that black residents of Richmond felt the need to issue the statement. Clearly they not only knew how their affective expressions were perceived, they knew the possible ramifications of invoking white resentments.

And free blacks were coming to find that there were a number of ways that whites were responding to the loss of the affective strictures of slavery. According to John David Smith, “most whites sought to define the new relationships with blacks in terms that would allow them to retain maximum control over blacks,” and so they sought of “new forms of racial control,” including share-cropping, black codes and mandatory contracts.⁷³⁸ And, I would argue, they sought new modes of affective discipline and control in the absence of the emotional norms of slavery. Enslaved people were all too aware of whites’ reluctance to say goodbye to slavery; Chesnut shared the remarks of a slave, who woefully observed that masters had “taken the bridle out of our mouths, but the halter is round our necks still.”⁷³⁹ One way this was done is through emotions. According to Stephen Tomlinson, even President Johnson was basing his policy off the understanding that “the popular sentiment on the race problem” was “keeping Africans in their place.”⁷⁴⁰ Thus the longing to maintain order was even framed in terms of emotions. This was the collective feeling, and it would shape emotional norms of the Jim Crow South. Faced with free blacks who could no longer be emotionally mastered, or affectively disciplined

⁷³⁷ Mitch Kachun *Festivals of Freedom*, 179-180

⁷³⁸ John David Smith *An Old Creed For the New South*, 27, 8

⁷³⁹ Similarly, an article from the *Nation* from August of 1865 asserted that “white southerners sought to ‘retain the slaveholding spirit without keeping the slaves.’” “Slave and Slaveocracy,” *Nation*, 1 (August 17, 1865) 202; *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War* (1981) 829

⁷⁴⁰ Stephen Tomlinson *Head Masters: Phrenology, Secular Education, and Nineteenth- Century Social Thought*, 347

as they had been under slavery, whites turned to extralegal and legal means alike to reinstate the social order of the emotional strictures of slavery.

One extralegal tool some white Southerners wielded was the use of violence to affectively control slaves through fear. Feeling threatened or challenged by free blacks, Eric Foner argues "some....whites wreaked horrible vengeance for offenses real or imagined."⁷⁴¹ But violent acts towards free blacks went beyond individual desires for "vengeance" or feelings of hurt, they represented a collective response to the loss of the modes of control that kept slavery in place. According to Foner, "the pervasiveness of violence" against free blacks in the Reconstruction-era South revealed the commitment of white Southerners "to define in their own way" what post-Emancipation society would look like, as well as "their determined resistance to blacks' efforts to establish their autonomy, whether in matters of family, church, labor, or personal demeanor."⁷⁴² Instilling fear was also used to systemically prevent blacks from voting. In an 1875 report on white terrorist efforts to dissuade black voters in Mississippi one observer noted that "the colored element is thoroughly intimidated, and will not vote at the ensuing election for fear of their lives." According to the report, this campaign of terror had far-reaching political implications, positing that the "intimidating business has been carried to this extent, that the Republican Party has failed, through fear," to see any candidates elected.⁷⁴³ Such violence had a profound dampening effect on the emotional as well as political liberty of many free blacks. Though in Atlanta former slaves had more latitude,

⁷⁴¹ Eric Foner *Reconstruction*, (1988), 119

⁷⁴² *Ibid*, 120

⁷⁴³ *Report of the Select Committee to Inquire into the Mississippi Election of 1875 with the Testimony and Documentary Evidence*, Vol. 2, 44th Congress, 2nd Session, Senate Report 527, Part 2 (Washington 1876), 103-107

Tera Hunter claims that “In rural areas of Georgia, residents were isolated, and thus more vulnerable to elements intent on depriving them of life, liberty and happiness.”⁷⁴⁴

Not content to deny blacks civil rights through terrorism alone, many whites, Southern as well as Northern, sought to disenfranchise blacks on the basis of emotions, arguing that free people of color were not affectively capable of being full citizens. Julius J. Fleming of South Carolina invoked this line of reasoning when he remarked that “The Negroes are to be pitied,” because he believed they did not comprehend how to exercise freedom.⁷⁴⁵ Of course, the claim that blacks were emotionally different or inadequate, and thus should be denied rights and power, was not a new argument. There had long been a perception that to be citizens, former slaves would need to learn to adopt the feelings and affective behavior of free people.

As early as 1796, a document printed by a Philadelphia-based abolition society issued a declaration “to the Free Africans and other free People of color in the United States,” claiming that abolitionists wanted them to “act worthily of the rank you have acquired as freemen.” The authors were clear that free people of color could prove that they had earned their status if they enacted proper social and affective behavior, including injunctions to be “faithful in all the relations you bear in society, whether as husbands, wives, fathers, children or hired servants. . . . be simple in your dress,” and “avoid frolicking, and amusements” that might “expose you to deserved reproach among your white neighbors.” The declaration continued, advising free people of color to always act “in a civil and respectful manner,” in order to stave off conflict and “remove every just occasion of complaint.” In this way, they

⁷⁴⁴ Tera W. Hunter *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 2-3

⁷⁴⁵ Eric Foner *Reconstruction*, (1988), 77

could “refute the objections which have been made against you as rational and moral creatures.”⁷⁴⁶

The authors’ advice about what behavior needed to be avoided spoke volumes about how free people of color, and their emotions, were perceived. Cautioning free people to be “faithful” and demure in dress and behavior suggested that they were seen by many in the North as given to disloyalty, or excessive exuberance. The abolitionists also insinuated that these measures were necessary, because people of color were believed to be irrational and immoral, and the only remedy for these perceptions was to learn the appropriate affective norms and practices of freedom and freemen. It also stated that if former slaves did not practice restraint in their behavior, relationships, and affective displays, then they would “deserve...reproach.” All this assumed that whites already held “objections” to free blacks, and that it was the responsibility of the latter, rather than the former, to “refute” these ideas and resentments. Only then would free blacks be deemed “worth(y)” of their “rank...as freemen” and the rights associated with that freedom.

Proslavery advocates also argued that enslaved people were emotionally unfit for freedom. In his 1838 defense of slavery William Harper justified slavery on the basis that “the love of liberty is a noble passion,” but that it was a “passion” that “a large portion of the human race” could “never” hope to achieve. Harper asserted that the desire for liberty was not enough, one had to also be emotionally capable of being free. He cautioned that unless the enslaved population was “properly disciplined and prepared for its enjoyment” freedom would be “fatal to himself and others” because if freed, former slaves would remain

⁷⁴⁶ American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Third Convention of Delegates from the Abolition Societies Established in Different Parts of the United States Assembled at Philadelphia, on the First Day of January, One Thousand Seven Hundred and Ninety-Six, and Continued, By Adjournments, Until the Seventh Day of the Same Month, Inclusive* (Philadelphia: Printed by Zachariah Poulson, 1796) 12-15

“savage,” and be left “miserable.” Furthermore, Harper claimed that enslaved people avoided the many emotional burdens of freedom, that in bondage they were “saved from the torturing anxiety concerning your own future support, and that of your children,” which he believed plagued so many free people.⁷⁴⁷ Thus Harper implied that slaves were not emotionally qualified for freedom not only because they were “savage,” and not “properly disciplined,” but because they would not be able to endure the supposed “anxiety” and misery of being free. In making this claim, Harper returned to the well-worn argument that enslaved people would be happier in bondage than free.

In the wake of the war, such arguments persisted, and even officials of the Freedmen’s Bureau described freed people as emotionally immature. When asked about the status of former slaves, self-avowed abolitionist Samuel Gridley Howe opined that “the white man seems to pass out of that phase of young life abounding in mirth and jollity,” upon reaching adulthood, “while the Negro remains longer in it, if indeed he ever gets out at all.”⁷⁴⁸ This suggested that white people emotionally developed as they grew up, shedding the “mirth” and frivolous joy of youth, but that black people never experienced an affective maturation, and thus remained in a suspended, child-like state.

Even reports on the feelings and emotional well-being of free people that were intended to be full of praise for free blacks were also infantilizing, and served to further the idea that blacks were more emotional than rational. An 1864 statement about the future for free people of color in the South noted that generally “the Africans were loyal men, who put faith in government for guidance and protection.” As laborers they were

⁷⁴⁷ William Harper “Harper’s Memoir on Slavery” *The Pro-Slavery Argument* (1852) 48-49, 73

⁷⁴⁸ Stephen Tomlinson *Head Masters: Phrenology, Secular Education, and Nineteenth-Century Social Thought*, 359

“willing” and “docile...not given to quarreling.... cheerful and uncomplaining.”⁷⁴⁹

Meanwhile, another officer in the Freedmen’s Bureau, Robert Dale Owen, even predicted that “the interaction of the races” in the post-war era “would be mutually beneficial.”

According to Owen, black people were “a knowing rather than a thinking race,” who tended to act off of “social instincts.” Because black people were, in his view,

“dominated by affections,” he argued that “the African would temper the cool and rational Anglo-Saxon.”⁷⁵⁰ Though Owen theorized that the differences he perceived in

the races would be “beneficial” to all involved, he was suggesting that people of color were emotional rather than rational, or “thinking,” and thus inferior. In many ways it

seemed that members of the Freedmen’s Bureau had embraced planter rhetoric that

blacks were happy and “cheerful” as workers, but still lacking in affective maturity and sophistication.

Southern whites were particularly concerned about the loss of legal methods for maintaining the affective strictures of slavery, and desperate to find formal alternatives.

According to Shane and Graham White former slaveholders were most anxious over “the possible termination of laws encoding subservience and inferiority” that accompanied

Emancipation.⁷⁵¹ This explained white anger when free blacks expressed emotions that as

slaves they had suppressed, or faced punishment for. A freedmen's bureau agent

remarked that white Southerners were “quite indignant if they are not treated with the

same deference that they were accustomed to” from enslaved people. According to Foner,

⁷⁴⁹ From the “Preliminary Report” from the “Report of the Secretary of War: Communicating in Compliance with a Resolution of the Senate of the 26th of May, a Copy of the Preliminary Report, and also of the Final Report of the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission” Washington, D.C.: Senate, 38th Congress, 1st Session, no. 53, 1864), quoted in Stephen Tomlinson *Head Masters*, 348

⁷⁵⁰ From Robert Dale Owen “The Wrong of Slavery: The Right of Emancipation and the Future of the African Race in the United States (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1864) 221, quoted in Stephen Tomlinson *Head Masters*, 350

⁷⁵¹ Shane White and Graham White *Stylin’*, 128-129

"behavior that departed from the etiquette of antebellum race relations frequently invoked violence," as white Southerners worked to preserve the affective modes of discipline employed throughout slavery, and sought revenge for any perceived affronts.⁷⁵² As a result, in spite of federal scrutiny during the period of Reconstruction, Shane and Graham White claim that Southern whites sought new laws that would restore the hierarchies of slavery "and the racial ideology and etiquette that buttressed it."⁷⁵³

Many of former slaveholders concerns were about the loss of affective modes of racial control. Eric Foner noted that "Rural whites" in particular "complained of 'insolence' and 'insubordination' among the freemen, by which they meant any departure from the deference and obedience expected under slavery."⁷⁵⁴ Of course, Foner asserts that almost any actions or affective behavior that displeased whites "became examples of 'insolence' and 'insubordination' in the case of blacks."⁷⁵⁵ Nor were these the only feelings or emotional displays that whites found inappropriate and worthy of punishment. John David Smith claims that "blacks were labeled as surly, insolent, annoying, impertinent, impudent, indifferent" and "ungrateful," all of which was perceived to be "Violating prior racial etiquette."⁷⁵⁶ I would argue that free blacks were not only resisting the "prior racial etiquette," such affective behavior was a challenge to what had been the emotional norms of slavery.

The answer for these anxieties lay in black codes, which attempted to codify post-war emotional relations between whites and blacks, in an effort to cling to the affective

⁷⁵² Eric Foner *Reconstruction* (1988) 120

⁷⁵³ For more on concerns about white concerns about "surrendering the etiquette of slavery" see John David Smith *An Old Creed For the New South*, 7 and Shane White and Graham White *Stylin'*, 127

⁷⁵⁴ Eric Foner *Reconstruction*, (1988) 79

⁷⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 120

⁷⁵⁶ John David Smith *An Old Creed For the New South*, 52-53

norms of slavery. According to legal historian William M. Wiecek, black codes prescribed racial hierarchies in part because they delineated “an etiquette of deference to whites,” that circumscribed interracial affective practices by laws including those “prohibiting blacks from directing insulting words at whites,” and barring “racial intermarriage.”⁷⁵⁷ Mississippi’s Black Code, for example, prohibited “insulting gestures, languages or acts” towards whites.⁷⁵⁸ Florida’s Black Codes explicitly stated the punishments for such affective infractions, stating that a laborer could be declared a vagrant if they were “convicted of ‘willful disobedience or orders.....impudence....disrespect to his employer’.” and thus they could be “hired out....if not imprisoned or whipped.”⁷⁵⁹ With the rise of Jim Crow, emotional norms that had been customer under slavery became law, as many of the expectations of affective censorship and performances of slavery were restored. According to Shane and Graham White these injunctions infused everyday interactions, as Black Southerners in the first half of the twentieth century were expected to embody “deference,” through “submissive gestures, modest deportment and suitably downcast eyes,” at all times acting “respectfully” to whites.”⁷⁶⁰

Of course, in spite of these laws, many white Southerners would continue to take offense at affective displays by blacks that they perceived as inappropriate. For example, in 1885, South Carolina Poet Paul Hamilton Hayne decried the “insubordination and

⁷⁵⁷ William M. Wiecek “Black Codes” in L.W. Levy, K.L. Karst and D.J. Mahoney *Civil Right and Equality* (New York: Macmillan, 1989) 111

⁷⁵⁸ *Laws of Mississippi, 1865*, in Walter Lynwood Fleming *Documentary History of Reconstruction* (Cleveland, 1907), 290; For more on the post-war Black Codes see Theodore Brantner Wilson *The Black Codes of the South* (University of Alabama Press, 1965) and John Mecklin “The Black Codes,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 16 (July, 1917)

⁷⁵⁹ Florida, *Acts*, 1866, nos. 240, 217, quoted in Daniel A. Novak *The Wheel of Servitude: Black Forced Labor After Slavery* (Lexington, 1978) 6. For more on Black Codes being enforced, or remaining on the books long into the 1870s see Chapter Three of *The Wheel of Servitude*.

⁷⁶⁰ For more on expectations of social displays of deference see Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, and Mary R. Gardner, *Deep South: A Social Anthropological Study of Caste and Class* (Chicago, 1941); Shane White and Graham White *Stylin’*, 155

impudence” of black people.⁷⁶¹ This suggests that even with the erosion of the advances of Reconstruction, and the rise of increasingly restrictive laws that worked to circumscribe black behavior and feelings, Southern whites continued to label any perceived miss-step by blacks as “impudence,” as a catch-all way of condemning and criminalizing black behavior. Southern whites were also increasingly hostile to black celebrations of freedom, still hurt over the idea that black people were taking delight in Southern surrender. Whites in Richmond were particularly outraged that local blacks “commemorated April 3, the date the Confederate capital was occupied by Union troops,” declaring that they would “wade through blood before the nigger shall celebrate the day.” (The celebration was carried out, in spite of such threats.)⁷⁶² Of course, as Mitch Kachun points out, as African Americans experienced increasing disillusionment with the promises of freedom, they were “left...with little reason to celebrate a freedom they did not truly possess.”⁷⁶³

Because of the return of such modes of racial control, many free people of color lost hope in Reconstruction, and where once they had felt the joy possible in freedom, many experienced increasing frustration.⁷⁶⁴ According to W.E.B. Du Bois, former slaves felt that many promises had been made to them in the name of freedmen, but he claimed that they were “destined in most cases to bitter disappointment.”⁷⁶⁵ Frustrated over white efforts to preserve the dynamics of slavery, DuBois wrote at the turn of the twentieth century that former slave-owners “still strove for... chains” with which to bind free

⁷⁶¹ July 7, 1885, Paul Hayne Papers, Duke University

⁷⁶² Mitch Kachun *Festivals of Freedom*, 118

⁷⁶³ Ibid, 148

⁷⁶⁴ John Hope Franklin *Reconstruction After the Civil War*, 215-217; Mitch Kachun *Festivals of Freedom*, 197; See also Eric Foner *Reconstruction*, (1988)

⁷⁶⁵ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1999) 28

blacks, and were “determined to perpetuate slavery under another name.”⁷⁶⁶ That name, it soon became evident, was Jim Crow.

Throughout the Jim Crow era African Americans experienced “Rapidly dwindling citizenship rights.”⁷⁶⁷ But white nostalgia for the affective past could not be sated or restored through such legislation. In his 1908 work on American racial relations, *Following the Color Line*, Ray Stannard Baker opined in 1908 that “Many Southerners look back wistfully to the faithful...cheerful, old plantation Negro, and deplore his disappearance.” As a result, he claimed that such Southerners “want the New South, but the old Negro,” and, I would argue, the return of the emotional norms of slavery.⁷⁶⁸ In some ways, their wishes were being granted, as the dual-pronged attack of legal and extralegal modes of intimidation forced many black Southerners to affectively perform and self-censor, or face the consequences. As under slavery, for Jim Crow blacks enacting deference entailed feigning certain emotions, and suppressing others.

An important part of this display of deference was the performance of happiness, represented by a perpetual smile. Benjamin Mays, the son of former slaves, recalled that in South Carolina at the turn of the twentieth century “Most Negroes grinned, cringed, and kowtowed in the presence of white people.” However, unlike those who had been enslaved, Mays observes that “those who could not take such subservience” escaped to nearby cities, or “went north.”⁷⁶⁹ Blacks knew that failure to perform the proper emotions in the presence of whites could have dire consequences. After a white Southerner remarked that Richard Wright did not “laugh and talk like other niggers” Wright

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid, 27-28

⁷⁶⁷ Mitch Kachun *Festivals of Freedom*, 146

⁷⁶⁸ Ray Stannard Baker *Following the Color Line: An Account of Negro Citizenship in the American Democracy* (New York, 1908) 44

⁷⁶⁹ Benjamin Mays *Born to Rebel: An Autobiography* (New York: Scribner, 1971) 25

conceded that he was not properly schooled in the emotional performances required of him to survive in the South. He claimed that he “would remember to dissemble for short periods then I would forget....the artificial status of race and class” and “act human again.” He noted that other blacks in the South would express their discontentment and “criticize...white behavior,” but around whites they displayed “false heartiness.”⁷⁷⁰

Promised the right to the “pursuit of happiness” as free people, the denial of black emotional liberty through legal and extralegal means was not just an emotional disenfranchisement, but a political one. As a result, it would have far-reaching ramifications on Southern society and racial relations, for generations to come. Yet it would seem that even incursions into the emotional liberty of free people didn’t diminish the importance of freedom for those who had been enslaved. According to Eric Foner, in spite of the many failures of the Reconstruction era, those who had experienced enslavement “would always regard the moment when 'de freedom sun shine out' as the great watershed of their lives.”⁷⁷¹ Nevertheless, the repressive emotional strictures of the Jim Crow South highlighted for many the urgent need to continue to seek emotional liberty. As W.E.B. Du Bois observed in *Souls of Black Folk*, “The black men of America...must strive for the rights which the world accords to men...life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”⁷⁷²

⁷⁷⁰ Richard Wright *Black Boy: A Record of Childhood and Youth* (New York, 1957) 175

⁷⁷¹ Eric Foner *Reconstruction* (1988) 77

⁷⁷² W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1999) 45

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